

LIZZIE
OF THE MILL

FROM THE

GERMAN

CHRISTINA TYRRELL



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FROM THE GERMAN OF W. HEIMBURG, *pseud*
Behrens, Berlin

BY
CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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LIZZIE OF THE MILL.



CHAPTER I.

A BRIGHT wood fire is blazing on the hearth in Baroness Derenberg's sitting-room, giving to the dusky apartment with its tall chimney-piece and old sculptured furniture a cosy, home-like air. In one of the deep window-recesses sits a young girl of about fourteen, looking out at the fading sunset glow of the short winter day. Her delicate profile appears sharply defined against the clear background of the window-pane. She has folded her small hands, which lie idly in

her lap, and her thoughts are evidently wandering far away.

“Mamma,” she says, suddenly, turning her head with its wealth of fair curls towards a pale, fragile-looking lady, who sits in an armchair by the fire, knitting. “Mamma, what a long, long while Army is staying in grandmamma’s room again. We shall not get to the mill after all, and it is high time we went there. Army has only a week’s leave, and four days of it have gone by already. He promised me for a certainty he would go with me to-day. What must Lizzie think, that he has not been down to see them yet?”

While speaking, the girl had risen and drawn nearer her mother. There was a look of vexation on her childish face.

“Patience, Nelly,” answered the mother, stroking her daughter’s blooming cheek. “You know, if grandmamma

wishes it, Army must remain with her ; he must stay as long as she likes. Grand-mamma has many things to say to him, no doubt. Practise patience, my darling ; it is so necessary to us through life. Light the lamp. Remember, there is yet much to be done to Army's linen."

The slight girlish figure, still so child-like in its contours, flitted almost noiselessly over the parqueted floor, and soon a bright light spread through the old-fashioned, but comfortable, room, making it look doubly snug and pleasant. The Baroness rose from her chair by the fire, and seated herself at a great round table. The rays from the lamp now fell on a pale, prepossessing countenance, on which care had graven many deep, sorrowful lines. Mother and daughter were alike in feature, but at this moment how different in expression ! The

youthful face opposite had brightened suddenly, the long lashes were lifted, and two great blue orbs flashed with a happy gleam, for outside in the corridor a quick elastic step was heard approaching. The door of the room was thrown open, and a dashing young officer entered. An eager light beamed in his eyes, and the bright, hopeful confidence natural to a lad of nineteen was written on his sunny brow. Nelly rushed up to him.

“Army, how glad I am you have come! Now we can go to the mill, cannot we?” she said, coaxingly, raising herself on tiptoe and winding her arms about his neck. “I will run and fetch my hood and cloak at once, for we have no time to lose. They have supper so punctually at the mill.”

She would have hurried gleefully away.

“Nelly,” cried the young man, catch-

ing her by the arm. "Say no more about this. It—it is not suitable now."

"Not suitable now?" The young girl looked up at her brother inquiringly.

"No, Nelly. You really must be reasonable. As a child one may associate with any one, just because one is a child; but for a man, an officer, holding a commission in the army, it would not do——"

"Well, you can come and see Lizzie, at least. You always used to be so ready to go there with me."

"Oh, Army," said the Baroness, "you do not mean it seriously. They are most worthy people down at the mill, and have always been very good to you. It would be ungrateful——"

"Mother, do reflect, I beg of you," he replied, his dark eyes sparkling angrily. "These people are a most uncivilised set.

Suppose the miller were to come over to B—— one day, and to take it into his head to call on me. A pretty state of embarrassment I should be in !”

“They are not an uncivilised set,” cried Nelly; “it is just grandmamma who has been telling you that, because she cannot endure the Ervings, or ‘their rags,’ as she says.”

“Their rags, that is just it,” laughed the young officer. “Let every one keep to his own class. You yourself, Nelly, will not always be able to be intimate there. With the first long skirt that trails behind you, it will be adieu, friend Lizzie of the rag-mill !”

“Never !” cried the girl, vehemently. “I would run over to the mill in the night if I were forbidden to go there in the day-time. Lizzie is my only friend. Whatever shall I say to explain your not going !” She burst into tears.

“Oh, you will find some excuse, little one; don't cry,” said her brother, consolingly. His voice was soft and tender now, just as it had often been in the old days when he had broken his sister's doll, and knew not what comfort to offer.

“Dear Army,” she pleaded, looking up at him hopefully; “you only meant to tease me. We *are* going to the mill, are we not?”

He stood for a moment irresolute. Before his mental vision there flitted the well-known figure of a small maiden, as he had seen her a hundred times of old—Lizzie, little Lizzie of the paper-mill down in the hollow. She looked up at him with sunny blue childish eyes; her red lips whispered, “Army, come with me, come to Aunty. She has apples for us, and I have found a bird's nest in the park. Come, Army, come.” Mechanic-

cally he made a movement, as though to seize his cap which lay on the table. The light from the lamp caught a sparkling ring on his hand; it was a richly enchased emerald, on which glittered a bear, the Derenberg crest. His glance rested on it for a moment; then he snatched up the cap and threw it on to a side-table. "Don't worry me," he said shortly, and turned away.

A long silence ensued. The young girl went back to her place at the table, bending her head low over her work; but the little fingers which plied the needle trembled violently, and great tears fell from her eyes on to the white material she was sewing. The Baroness sighed, and followed her son with sad, wistful looks, as he paced restlessly up and down the room. The old rococo clock struck six, and began to play some

long-forgotten love-song. The sweet simple melody echoed through the lofty chamber, then died away, and still a troubled silence reigned among these three who yet were bound together by love's tenderest ties.

“Army,” said the pale lady, at length, “when did grandmamma give you the ring you are wearing on your finger?”

He stopped before the fire-place, and thrust the poker in between the glowing embers, so that the sparks flew high. Then he answered—

“This afternoon, just now, when I was in her room.”

“Do you know that it is your father's ring, Army?”

The young man turned quickly. “No, mother, Granny did not tell me that. She merely spoke in a general way about the crest and its significance, and . . .”

“Well, my son, then *I* will tell you.” The Baroness’s voice faltered, and shook with repressed agitation. “It is the ring grandmamma drew from your father’s cold and stiffened hand after he . . . when he was dead.” The last words ended with a half-stifled cry, and the speaker sank back in her chair, shattered, as it were, by her emotion.

“My dear, good little mother!” exclaimed Army, hurrying to her side, while Nelly, stooping over her, nestled her cheek against the wan face over which bitter tears were streaming.

“Don’t cry, dear mother,” implored the young man. “I will hold the ring high in honour, to show how proud the son is of his father’s memory. I will strive to become as good, as noble of heart as he was.”

In these words, in the look he raised to

his weeping mother's face, there lay the genuine conviction of an unspoiled filial heart, the absolute faith which endows the dead father with all fairest qualities, and regards him as the best of men. But his speech produced a strange, an overwhelming effect. The Baroness started from her chair; her frail form was drawn erect. She gazed at her son vacantly as one distraught, and then exclaimed, in wild tones of horror—

“ My Army, too ! Oh, Almighty Father, spare me that, spare me but that ! ”

“ My mother is ill,” cried the young man, and hurried to the bell; but the sound of a weak voice whispering, “ Come back, Army, it is over now,” recalled him to her side.

She took a glass of water thankfully, and said, with an attempt at a smile—

“ I have frightened you both, poor

children. The remembrance of your father's death is full of anguish to me, even after this lapse of years; but now that Army is about to go out into the world, I must speak to you of the past, which I have hitherto always avoided doing. You must often have wondered to yourselves," she continued, after a pause—"why we lead so simple and retired a life; a life from which all luxury is so rigorously banished. Ah, Army, it is not for myself, it is for you both I grieve! You will find yourself in the most cruel position imaginable, and all this trouble has been brought upon you by the boundless folly of your . . ."

She stopped as though in alarm at her own words, and broke into a flood of bitter tears.

Armand stood by the fire-place with knitted brows, watching intently and

anxiously for what should come next. The sunny expression had vanished from his face, swept away, as it were, by some stormy gust of feeling, and about his mouth were lines telling of grievous disappointment.

“When your father brought me home, a bride—I was then a child of sixteen—all was gaiety here and splendour,” went on the Baroness. “Castle Derenberg had for long years been famous for its hospitality, and your grandmamma well knew how to attract guests to the house. She was at that time still very beautiful, almost as enchanting as she is represented in the great picture upstairs in the portrait-gallery; and she loved luxury and grandeur. To me she was then so kind and good, I really thought I had found in her a second mother. Ah, that brief, brilliant period was the fairest of

my life! When I pressed you to my heart, Armand, and you, my Nelly, it seemed to me that nothing was wanting to my happiness. Then came the terrible shock of your father's sudden death. Swiftly, and without any warning, misfortunes poured in upon us." She shuddered, and pressed her trembling hands to her temples, as though trying to convince herself that the events she was narrating really belonged to a far bygone past. "After his death a trustee was appointed me in the person of old Councillor Hellwig. It soon appeared that our affairs were in the most terrible disorder. Look which way we might, there were mortgages, bonds, unpaid bills. Grandmamma and I suddenly found ourselves involved in a labyrinth of debt and difficulty. How many sleepless nights, how many days of care have

passed since then! And to this hour, in spite of all old Hellwig's exertions, no ray of light has won its way into the chaos."

"Do not distress yourself, dear mother," entreated the young officer. "Of course, I have long known that our means were very limited, though I could not guess that we were so poor as you say. But, courage! better times will surely come, and grandmamma was saying to me just now that things are not so desperate, as we may expect to inherit a considerable fortune from Aunt Stontheim."

"Yes, grandmamma believes in your chance of this fortune, but . . ."

"She thinks," broke in the young man, eagerly, "she thinks I ought to go and pay my respects to Aunt Stontheim before I join my regiment."

"I have no objection to your doing so,

my son ; and I sincerely hope that grand-mamma may not be mistaken in her views ; but we must not forget that the Königsburg Derenbergs have as good a title to inherit as we have. The daughter of Colonel von Derenberg, of the 16th, can lay claim to precisely the same right as you and Nelly."

At this moment Sanna, the Baroness's old waiting-woman, opened the great folding-doors, and the elder Madame von Derenberg entered the room. Stately and commanding of aspect, she carried herself well erect, despite her sixty years, and wore the simple grey woollen dress, in which she was now clad, with the same grace and dignity wherewith she had once borne through these apartments her heavy silken trains. Her abundant hair, raven still in its hue and drawn slightly back from the temples, was

covered by a little cap, from beneath the yellowish lace of which her magnificent black eyes blazed forth with all the fire of youth. There was an aristocratic air, a look of breeding, about her whole appearance, and her delicate features wore an expression of unconquerable pride. How old the careworn, sickly daughter-in-law looked beside the imposing figure of this gentlewoman!

Armand hastened towards her, took from her a great book she held in her hand, and led her to the fire, about which Sanna had placed several chairs in readiness. The little granddaughter had sprung from her seat at sight of the new-comer, and the pale lady furtively wiped the last lingering tears from her eyes.

“What was the subject under discussion?” asked the old Baroness, taking

a seat next the fire, and dismissing the maid with a wave of the hand. "I heard something about 'the same right as you and Nelly.'" "

"We were speaking of Aunt Stontheim and of the succession to the property," replied her daughter-in-law, taking the opposite chair; "that made me think of the Königsburg Derenbergs, and I was saying that Blanche was just as much entitled to inherit the fortune as our children."

"Blanche! What an idea!" cried the old lady, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That red-haired consumptive creature? Madam Stontheim has too good taste, thank God, to make such a mistake as that. Besides, if I remember rightly, she always entertained a most well-founded dislike to that swaggering Colonel and his washed-out look-

ing spouse, whom he picked up, Heaven knows where—in some corner of England or Scotland, I think. She was a Miss Smith, or a Miss Newman, was she not? It was some common name of that sort. No, Cornelia, this is merely another of those groundless, far-fetched notions with which you torment yourself and others.”

An ironical tone pervaded this speech. The haughty dame was generally ironical when she addressed her daughter-in-law.

“I only meant,” returned the latter, gently, “I only meant that one must not count with too great certainty.” She paused. “Life brings so many disappointments, that really . . .”

“Bah!” interrupted the old lady, angrily. “Army will find his way to the querulous old woman’s heart, and will manage matters so that her really princely fortune will descend to him.”

“What do you mean by that, Granny?” the young man’s clear tones now suddenly struck in. “I should hope you do not desire me to go legacy-hunting, as it is called. I shall behave politely to her, as a gentleman should behave to a lady, but that will be all. I can’t manoeuvre and humbug. What she does not give me of her own free will, she can keep to herself.”

In some astonishment, the old lady raised herself from her negligent attitude in the arm-chair, and her eyes sparkled with indignation at this outspoken protest, as she fixed them on her grandson’s face. . . .

“Would you believe this possible from a young fledgeling of his age?” she asked, in a tone which she endeavoured to render playful, but which vibrated with real anger. “What, Army, have you

laid aside respect for your elders with your cadet's coat, and do you imagine, because your epaulets are a week old, you can instruct your grandmother, and afford to despise her counsels? You are too young still to form a right judgment of the situation on which you are about to enter. Is it legacy-hunting, when one endeavours to win the heart of an old relation?"

"Yes, Granny," said Armand, stoutly, not a muscle of his handsome face relaxing beneath her gaze. "Yes, it is fortune-hunting when one tries to win a person's heart, in the hope of getting his or her money."

"Which is absolutely necessary, if one does not want to starve on a crust all one's life, and drag out one's days in a castle without domains or revenue," interrupted the old Baroness, angrily,

with a pettish little jerk of her chair backwards.

“That I admit, Granny; and I should not have spoken so decidedly, if I had not known there was another heiress. But as Blanche——”

“That Blanche again! What do you know about her? Are you sure even that the poor sickly creature is still living? How distressing it is to hear children, who have barely left school, parading their wonderful wisdom! I desire that you go to your aunt Stontheim, Armand, and I will brook no contradiction. The letter announcing your arrival will be sent to-day.”

“Certainly, Granny. I am ready to go as soon as you wish,” said Army, with cool politeness.

She rose. Her proud face was suffused with a crimson flush, and there was a

hard obstinate expression in the lines about her mouth. Never had the likeness between the old lady and her grandson been more strikingly apparent. With flashing eyes and lips tightly set, they confronted each other in a hostile attitude, neither willing to yield an inch.

“ You will leave to-morrow by the five o'clock coach,” said the grandmother, coldly and decidedly ; then, without waiting for the young man's bow of assent, she took leave of her dismayed daughter-in-law by a slight inclination of the head, and walked out of the room.

A painful silence reigned when the folding-doors had closed behind the tall figure of the old Baroness. Though he had so audaciously ventured to oppose the haughty woman, whose word was as law to every soul in the house, the young man now stood quietly by the

chimney-piece, looking down at the blazing fire, calm and indifferent as though nothing unusual had happened. Nelly gazed over at her brother with wide, wondering eyes. He was not like himself to-day. No one spoke. After a while old Sanna came into the room again. She carried a letter in her hand, and asked :

“ Does my lady want anything brought from the village? Henry has to go to the post. It is snowing so hard just now, he might do both errands at once.”

The Baroness answered in the negative, and the old servant speedily disappeared. Armand meanwhile had sat down at the table, and was turning over the leaves of the book he had taken from his grandmother's hands shortly before.

“ Ah, here is something about our lovely ancestress, Agneta Maud, who is

up in the portrait gallery," he cried, joyfully. "Here, little sis, this is interesting. Come and listen."

The young girl went up to him, bent over the back of his chair, and looked curiously down at the ancient yellow page covered with faded written characters very hard to decipher.

Army read, spelling out the words with difficulty:—"On the 30th November of the year 1694, the body of the high-born lady, Agneta Maud, Baroness Derenberg, Lady of the Manor of Derenberg, Schüttenfelde and Braunsbach, by birth Baroness Krobitz of the House of Trauen, was solemnly interred in the ancestral vaults of this Castle of Derenberg in a manner in all things conformable with the directions left by her in writing. To wit: the bier stood in the great hall next the chapel, the coffin being covered by two palls,

first a greater white one, and over this a black velvet pall having a cross worked in cloth of silver. Thereupon lay a silver-gilt crucifix. The sides were ornamented with eight smaller, the ends at head and foot with larger escutcheons bearing the conjoined arms of the Derenberg and Trauen houses richly embroidered on yellow satin. The coffin was borne into the chapel by nobles of the country round, who had partaken of many a goodly banquet here. Immediately following the corpse came the six sons of the deceased together with the deeply afflicted widower. . . .”

“This is tiresome,” said the young officer, breaking off; “but see here, a little farther on.”

“And this lady, Agneta Maud, Baroness Derenberg, was by all accounts a proud and discreet woman who stood faithfully

by her husband through all perils and dangers. She was tall of stature and slender, and her hair was red of hue, the which might have been taken as no good sign, according to the proverb—

‘In woman, horse, and hound,
Beauty is the thing of worth,
Beauty and good birth.
Can’st find such free from trick and vice
Hast a treasure of great price.
But, beware! Look to the haire!
If redde, be sure ’twill prove a snare,
Let it not thee entice.’

Yet it would not appear that she was more cunning or versed in tricks than others of her sex, but showed herself always a discreet and noble lady. So notable was her beauty, that a cavalier, who was enslaved by her charms, and to whom she would accord no favourable hearing, took his own life in despair at her obduracy—the which may God forgive him! And she found him stretched

in his blood before the entrance-door of her chamber, so that a great alarm seized upon her, and in that hour she was overtaken by a fever so fierce that it was thought she would miserably perish from the effects of it. But the great Giver of all blessings sent her a happy recovery; notwithstanding which, from that day forth no sound of laughter issued from her lips; and the cavalier, who is said to have been a lord of Streitnitz, was laid to his rest here in the Castle garden."

"What do you say to that, little mother?" cried Army, quite excited by his discovery. "I can fancy a man committing suicide for her sake! Hers is a wonderful face! I wish I could take the picture with me, and hang it up in my quarters. She must have been a charming creature, this Agneta Maud!"

“Why, Army,” said the Baroness, smiling. “I had no idea that your first passion had for its object a fair one long deceased. Well, at all events, we need not fear it will prove a very dangerous affair, need we, Nelly?”

Nelly made no reply. The little party could not regain its wonted cheerfulness that evening. The young girl sat silently bending over her work, thinking what excuse she could offer for her brother to Lizzie. Armand plunged anew into his study of the old book, and the transient smile soon vanished from the Baroness's lips. Every now and then she would pass her hand across her eyes and sigh heavily, and each time a deep-drawn sigh reached her children's ears they, by common accord, would turn their heads and glance with concern and anxious enquiry at their mother's care-lined face; then they

went back to their several occupations.

“My lady wishes to take tea in her own room,” said old Sanna, appearing again. “She begs to be excused from coming in to supper. My lady has a bad headache.”

The ancient waiting-woman carried a tray on which stood an old-fashioned tea-pot, and a cup and saucer of quaint design. She was evidently about to take up her mistress’s tea. As she stood at the door waiting for an answer, she scrutinised the three occupants of the room narrowly, to ascertain, no doubt, what effect her news would produce on them. The dreamy lady sitting over the fire seemed not to have heard the message; she started when her little daughter replied kindly—

“We are very sorry indeed to hear

that, Sanna dear; and we wish grand-mamma a speedy recovery."

"Is your mistress ill, Sanna?" asked the Baroness.

"Yes," replied the maid, drawing up her great angular figure to its full height, and fixing her severe grey eyes on the startled face of the lady who addressed her. "Her ladyship must have been taken ill here, for she was suffering from violent palpitation when she came upstairs to her room. I have had to mix three soothing powders for her already. It is to be hoped no worse may come of it."

There was something reproachful and impertinent in this answer—less in the words themselves than in its tone, and in the expression of the old woman's face. A hot flush mounted to the Baroness Derenberg's pale cheek.

“I am sorry to hear it,” she replied, raising her voice a little, and motioning to Sanna to withdraw; “and I trust your mistress will be better to-morrow.”

“Very well,” replied the old servant, and turned to leave the room, in obedience to the sign given her. There was now no mistaking the overt hostility displayed in her attitude, and stamped on the hard features beneath her quilled cap.

Armand had sprung from his seat. His face was crimson with indignation, and he turned sharply on the woman as she went.

“Army, I beg of you, let her be,” said the Baroness. “You will only make matters worse by attempting to call her to account. She has always been the same. The hot Southern blood will show itself in her, as in her mistress—and then, she fairly worships your grand-

mother. You know, Army, that she came with her from Venice, lived with her during the period of her prosperity, and now faithfully shares in all her cares and privations. Sanna has many good qualities. Fidelity such as hers is rare; and she loves you children, and especially you, Army, with all her heart. She is very old, too, and one must make allowances, and pass over a good deal."

Armand made no reply. He took up his cap. "I must go out for a little while, or I shall not sleep," he said, half-apologetically, kissed his mother's hand, and left the room.

Outside in the cold lofty corridor, he hesitated a moment as to where he should go. "I must fetch a coat first," he thought, and strode down the long passage to his own room. He was in a strange, a perturbed frame of mind to-

day. For the first time life's stern realities had been brought forcibly before him. He had known, of course, that his family was poor; but in true boyish fashion he had accepted the fact, not thinking out the matter further. Now his grandmother had spoken to him on the subject, and at the same time had set before him the prospect of a handsome fortune, to be inherited in the future. Unfortunately, there were other claims to this inheritance: there was "that little red-haired creature," as his grandmother had called her, to be taken into account.

His thoughts reverted to the beautiful Agneta Maud. What was it the verse said?

"Beware! Look to the haire!
If redde, be sure 'twill prove a snare."

Would the red hair bode him ill, he wondered? But, no; he was a man, and had no turn for such foolish fancies.

Granny had said, "All my hopes rest on you, Army, and on the Stontheim fortune," and he had replied roughly, throwing at her something about "legacy-hunting." To be sure, there was that Blanche to be thought of, that little carrotty Blanche—the remembrance of her would come up again. Well, Aunt Stontheim might divide the money among the three—Blanche, Nelly, and himself. Yes, that would be a way out of the difficulty. Perhaps, after all, everything would come right in the end.

He began to feel chilly. Going up to the hearth he threw a handful of brush-wood on the waning fire. The flames shot up, crackling among the dry twigs, and casting a fitful, uncertain light over the parqueted floor. Their red glare brought into bright relief the gilt foliage wherewith the old chimney-piece was

ornamented, and the young man's eyes absently followed the windings of the oak leaves which ran beneath the mantel-shelf garlandwise, framing in the centre a tablet bearing this legend,

“Make God thy stay,
Luck cometh any day,”

—an old adage dating from long bygone times. “‘Luck cometh any day,’” he murmured to himself. Had he never read the words before? They took a powerful hold on him in this hour. Might not his luck turn, and fortune smile on him again?

He looked up at the splendid antlers which decorated the room—tokens, one and all, of the prowess of former Derenbergs, as the appended labels, marked with name and date, testified—the proud spoil of many a happy hunting bout in their own woods, those woods which were

now all sold or mortgaged. But it might even yet be possible—why not?—that he himself should hunt and shoot there where his forefathers had so often stalked the deer. Away with sombre, foolish fancies! Life lay before him, life so rich in hope, and so alluring—surely, luck might come any day.

Sunshine spread over his young face again. His heart beat high in his breast, and he felt himself strong and ready to meet all the storms before him. Forwards, on into the beating waves. The madder their fury, the better the fight. Be it pain or pleasure, he would take it as it came. A life without a struggle is not half a life. “I will beg Granny’s pardon about the legacy-hunting,” he thought; “and I must try and persuade my mother not to look so sad. What is the use of being so miserable? Even the

little one hung her head. Ah, but that was about Lizzie, young Lizzie of the mill. Bah! a trifle not worth mentioning, as she would see herself later on!"

He whistled a merry tune as he paced down the corridor again on his way back to his mother's sitting-room.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning Armand, bright and buoyant as ever, repaired to his grandmother's presence, and sought forgiveness for his last night's offence. He was promptly taken into favour again. True, the old lady shrugged her shoulders and smiled, as he propounded to her his famous plan of sharing the property with the as yet unknown Blanche.

"You are a fantastic boy," she said lightly. She did not attempt to contradict him, however, but pointed to a stool at her feet, adding, "Sit down; I

have some things yet to say to you before we part."

The Dowager's rooms were still fitted up with the luxurious furniture purchased for them in her early days, and at the first glance they almost gave the idea of splendour; but on closer observation it became evident that the colour of the heavy crimson hangings had faded, and that the silken coverings of the seats showed threadbare here and there. Nevertheless, the curtained doors and windows, the elegant rosewood furniture and great Turkey carpet gave to the apartment an air of refined comfort, and well-nigh of luxury. On the walls, handsomely mounted in gilt frames, hung a series of smiling Italian landscapes. These pictures were so many *souvenirs* of the happy days spent by the Baroness—then the young and much-admired

Countess Luja—in Venice and Naples, the memories of which days would at times help her to forget the dreary present.

“I need not give you any hint as to the line of conduct you should adopt towards your Aunt Stontheim, Army,” she began, cleverly avoiding the rock on which they had so nearly split the night before; “you will know very well how to behave. Remember me kindly to her, and tell her I am nothing now but a tiresome, weary old woman.”

“Ah! I must decline that commission, Granny,” said Armand, gallantly. “I cannot really burthen my conscience with a lie.”

The old lady smiled, flattered by his little compliment, and tapped him lightly on the cheek. “For shame! to be satirical to your old grandmother!”

Army kissed her hand. "And what else has my grandmother to say to me?"

"Ah! you remind me, there is one warning I must give you. You are going out into the world at an early age, and you have inherited the warm, the passionate temperament of my ancestors. Enjoy your youth to your heart's content, but beware of any serious attachment. The bride you bring home must unite much in herself. We must have an old family and money, Army—plenty of money. This is one of the few ways open to you by which you may retrieve the fallen fortunes of your house. Well, that is all," she concluded. "Promise to write to me occasionally, and there remains nothing more to the said between us."

The young officer smiled. "Certainly,

Granny, I will write soon, for I shall have plenty of time on my hands, and you need not be uneasy; I can hardly think of marriage yet. Why, I am only just nineteen." He laughed outright. There was no trace of yesterday's shadow to be seen on his bright face. "May I say good-bye now, Granny?" he asked. "I want to take one turn through the portrait gallery, and pay a parting visit to the fair Agneta Maud. Look here, granny, I can set your mind at rest at once. Unless I meet with a girl with a face like hers, I'll never marry at all, for she is my ideal of what a woman should be."

"Do you mean that Maud with the red hair?" asked the old lady in surprise.

He nodded. "I have a weakness for red hair. By-the-by, Granny, may I keep the book you brought downstairs yesterday evening?"

“Certainly. It is a family chronicle, and I intended it for you.”

“Thanks—a thousand thanks! Well, good-bye till dinner time.”

Whistling a tune, he strode along the corridor to the old family portrait-gallery, and was soon standing before the picture of the fair Agneta Maud. The small, well-formed head was brought up in relief from the background with almost a sculptor's art; a cloud of luxuriant golden, nay, red hair, was drawn back from the white brow and confined in a little cap of some silver tissue. Below the smooth forehead, below the sharply defined eyebrows, which formed so striking a contrast to the bright hair, a pair of great dark eyes looked forth, gazing at the spectator with an expression of deep, unfathomable melancholy—gazing dreamily, wistfully, as though ever in

quest of some lost happiness. The light which stole into the gallery was faint and subdued. Armand drew back the curtain of the window nearest him, and the cold clear rays of the winter sun streamed in, illumining the lovely face and the warm tints of the hair, so that it seemed to glisten with innumerable golden threads ; and again those eyes worked with their old magic on the young man—those deep, dreamy eyes, full of an ineffable sadness.

Suddenly he heard a light footstep, and his sister's rosy little hand was laid on his shoulder.

“So here you are, Army? We are just going to dinner. Do come down. You will have to start directly, and I have not seen you the whole morning.”

He drew the young girl to him. “Look me in the face, Nelly,” he said, putting

his hand under the little chin, and raising it to him.

“Are you all right now, or do you feel angry with me still?”

Her eyes were moist with dew as she raised them to her brother's face, but she shook her head and smiled.

“Angry? No, oh no. But do come away, it is so cold here.”

He took her hand, and together they walked towards the door. Before closing it, Armand turned to have one last look at the picture.

“‘Beware! Look to the haire!
If redde, be sure 'twill prove a snare.
Let it not thee entice,’”

he muttered to himself.

Hardly an hour later old Sanna stood upstairs at one of the windows of the great corridor, looking after Army as he departed. He had taken leave of his

sorrowing mother, and was just crossing the open space in front of the Castle, Nelly following him, wrapped in her little cloak. She would not be denied the pleasure of remaining near her brother up to the very last moment.

“Ah, he is his grandmamma all over,” murmured old Sanna to herself. “It gladdens one’s heart just to look at him.” She shaded her eyes with her hand, that she might see him better. “No one will say him nay. He may have any girl he chooses. The richest, the handsomest will be glad to take him. He’ll not be as unfortunate as his father was before him. Oh, if my lady could but live to see the Castle alive with gay doings, as in the old days! It would make her young and handsome again. Holy saints in Heaven, how I would thank ye on my knees for it!”

Meanwhile the brother and sister stepped briskly on down the old lime avenue. Wonderfully beautiful was the winter scene which lay before them. Far away in the distance, framed as it were in the trees, glistened the snow-covered mountains. On one side could be seen the white roofs of the village, from almost every chimney of which a column of smoke rose perpendicularly in the cold clear air; on the other, a grand stretch of forest clothed the hill-side; while everywhere, over hill and dale, a dazzling, fleckless sheet was spread. All nature was still as death. From time to time there came only the hoarse caw, caw of a swarm of crows as they rose from the trees, scattering from the branches the gleaming snow-flakes which drifted slowly to the ground; and over the whole landscape lay the rosy shimmer

of the setting sun, declining gradually on the far horizon in a violet sea of wondrous hue.

The young man's eyes wandered over the lovely picture before him.

"Look, Nelly," said he; "all this, as far as your eye can reach, was ours once."

"The paper-mill, too?" asked the little sister, pointing to its slate-tiled gables.

"Not the mill itself, but a considerable portion of the land now belonging to it. Our grandfather sold some of the Derenberg woods to the miller when he was in difficulties—so Granny has told me. The man has grand shooting of his own now, while we——"

Army passed his hand across his eyes—then he laughed, and began to whistle. He was resolved not to give way to dismal thoughts.

At the park gate he turned once more,

and looked back down the long avenue. The great portico of the castle gleamed white in the distance. Its broad steps were thickly carpeted with snow, which the wind had drifted and piled up against the massive doors. Beautiful as the enchanted castle of some fairy tale his ancestral home appeared, flooded by the light from the setting sun now intensely crimson in its glow. The windows shone like liquid gold over to where the young man stood—roseate and golden as the dreams of the future which had dawned in his sanguine mind.

“There must be a change here,” he said. “There must, I am determined.”

He turned and followed his sister.

In silence they went on together. At length the young officer stopped, and looked at his watch.

“I must step out now, little sis, if I

want to catch the mail," said he. "You go back, dear. You will only get your feet chilled, trudging through this deep snow. Good-bye, little one; my love to them all once again. Try not to mope. You must find the time long in that solitary old castle." He looked down at her almost compassionately.

She shook her head. "Oh no; I have Lizzie, remember."

They stood just at the spot where the bypath by which they had come issued into the high-road; directly opposite them lay another path which led through a fir plantation down to the mill. Here, on the hill, stood a great lime-tree, spreading its branches wide over a snow-covered seat. From this point the high-road declined rapidly towards the village below, whence the note of a post-horn was now distinctly heard ascending.

“Must I depart, so kiss me, sweet heart,
Kiss me right tenderly; 'tis hard to leave thee.
Farewell, farewell.”

sang a clear childish voice, trilling forth the melody in joyous ringing tones, somewhat at variance with the sorrowful refrain. Next minute a young girl stepped out from among the firs. She started on seeing the two figures on the other side of the road. A deep blush overspread the childish face, and a pair of beautiful blue eyes were lowered suddenly, as though in alarm—but this was momentary. She went quickly up to the brother and sister, a bright smile playing about her sweet mouth, and forming two delicious little dimples in her cheeks.

“Oh, Nelly, how glad I am I met you! And you, Army,” she asked, innocently, and without a trace of shyness, “you are going away already, and have not been down once to see us at the Mill?”

The young officer crimsoned, as he met the gaze of those blue eyes, and felt the grasp of the little hand which held his in childish fashion. He was not yet sufficiently an adept in this world's ways to invent an excuse on the spur of the moment. The smile disappeared from the lovely rosy face which was uplifted to him with an enquiring, reproachful look.

“Army has to leave quite suddenly,” said Nelly; “else”—she hesitated—it was impossible to her to tell a lie to this trustful young creature. She could have cried for shame; and in her distress she turned to her brother, as though imploring his aid.

But the few words she had spoken were enough for her friend. “Good Army!” she said, quite satisfied now. “I had begun to suspect you, to fancy you would never come near the mill again. I was

just going up to Nelly,"—she laughed, and the dimples came back to her cheeks —“to see if what Aunty declares were true, if you really had grown proud. But now I can laugh at her, can't I? You would have come to-day, or to-morrow at the very latest,” she said, with loyal confidence.

He was looking at her rather absently, as though lost in thought. “How tall you have grown,” he said, at length, surveying the slender figure before him. Lizzie had indeed shot up to a height almost equal to his own; and very charming she appeared this afternoon in her blue velvet jacket trimmed with fur. Suddenly she flushed scarlet beneath his gaze, and asked quickly—

“Are you going by the five o'clock coach? Then you must hurry, Army. I am glad to have had a look at you in

your officer's uniform." She held out her hand to him again, and he took it, smiling pleasantly himself now. Memories of his childhood were stealing over him.

"Touch last, Army," cried she, smote him lightly on the shoulder, and ran off.

For one moment the young man stood irresolute, half inclined, it almost seemed, to hasten after her, and give her back her "touch last." It had been their invariable custom in the old days to tease each other in this manner, whenever she left the castle, or he the mill; they had so enjoyed the sport! But, bethinking himself, he drew his overcoat together, nodded a last good-bye, and strode away. Not once did he glance back at the two girls, who stood arm-in-arm looking after him. He had no time to spare.

Beneath the old snow-laden lime the friends stood and watched. One pair of

blue eyes grew moist with dew, and a voice, from which all gaiety had suddenly died out, whispered a low "farewell, farewell."

At this Nelly wept too, and as her brother's figure disappeared among the houses of the village, she asked anxiously, "Lizzie, you are not angry with Armand, are you?"

But Lizzie made no reply. She only shook her little head, and walked on quite silently by her companion's side.

The rosy glow had faded from the sky; only a pale yellow flame lingered on the horizon. The windows of the castle looked forth drearily as ever on the changeless scene without. Once more the old monotony had set in, and both young hearts were heavy, weighed down by the pain of parting. When the girls reached the park gate, they kissed each

other tenderly—far more tenderly than was their wont—and Lizzie felt as if she could hardly release her friend's little hand, as again and again they whispered their "good-night."

CHAPTER III.

THE rag-mill, as the paper-works had from time immemorial been styled throughout the district, was charmingly situated among tall old trees on the bank of a noisy little river. The handsome dwelling-house, with its gilt weather-vane on the summit of the slate-tiled roof, dated from the earlier half of the last century, and it had preserved the character of that period. The heavy oaken hall-door, with its brightly burnished brass knocker, was the original hall-door; no modern plate-glass had as yet replaced the small lozenge panes of

the windows, and the inscription engraved on the grey old balcony set forth that "This House was Built to the Honour of God in the Year 1741 by Johann Friedrich Erving and his Wife Ernestine, born Eisenhardtin." Ready as ever were the old dragon-heads at the four corners of the roof, to drink in and sputter out the rain-water; and the sandstone seats on either side the house-door, beneath the two great limes, still formed the favourite resting-place of the family in summer-time. The house was encompassed on three sides by a great garden abounding in fruit, wherein were straight parallel walks, a shady bower of jessamine, and a perfect forest of gooseberry and raspberry bushes. This garden was under the special care and supervision of old Aunty. The whole country round could produce no such

excellent varieties of apples and pears as were to be found at the mill, and the asparagus in Aunt Marie's carefully-tended beds was justly celebrated for its fine flavour and extraordinary size.

Who indeed could have pictured to himself the paper-mill without that old woman? What a genial air of comfort there was about the place, and what a home-like feeling came over the traveller on crossing the wooden foot-bridge which lay exactly opposite the dwelling-house! The old dame would bend forward behind the snow-white curtains, and welcome the arriving guest with a look of her bright friendly eyes; then she would push aside her spinning-wheel, and rise to meet the new-comer. So alert and brisk were her movements that she was generally in time to receive the visitor at the entrance-door, always standing hospitably

open, and there to give him kindly greeting. "Ah, this is well! God bless you! How pleased Minna"—(the mistress of the house)—or, "how pleased Friedrich"—(the master)—"will be!" So saying, she would trip on first and open an inner door, to admit the guest to the comfortable parlour; and, taking a formidable bunch of keys from her side, would forthwith disappear in the direction of the kitchen and garden. The old woman had lived at the mill ever since she was ten years old. She had early been left an orphan, and the grandfather of the present owner, pitying the forlorn state of the sweet-tempered, lovable little maiden, took her home, and brought her up under his own roof-tree, where she became the friend and playmate of his two children. This benefit the orphan repaid by unwavering fidelity and de-

votion to her guardians. Stanch in their days of trial, she shared alike in their good and ill fortune. Long and long ago she had grown to be a loved and valued member of the family, to whose happiness and comfort she was absolutely indispensable. The Ervings had always been noted for their kindness and benevolence towards the poor. They had never let their right hand know what their left hand gave, and the Lord had remembered it to them, as old Aunty had so often said. They were the richest people of all the country side.

At the mill had ever lived men of the true old Teuton stamp, whose hand upon it was worth a thousand oaths, and who joined to bright, active intelligence a strong, steady will and indefatigable energy. "Work and pray" had always been the family motto, impressed on the

children by the parents. The mill was celebrated for yet another thing, to wit, for the beauty of its daughters, which was almost proverbial. "As bonnie as if she came from the mill," was a current phrase in the village when a compliment to a pretty girl was intended; and the blue eyes of the miller's beautiful daughters had for generations past troubled many a manly breast, and provoked many a heartache.

Joyous doings the old mill had witnessed, too—merry revels, and the fair blossoming of hopeful young lives; and the joy and the merriment had ever been innocent, honest, of the true golden ring.

There had always been a good neighbourly understanding between the castle and the mill. On either side were loyal natures which could but esteem and

honour each other; and whenever the reigning lord of the manor rode along the banks of the babbling stream, and the mill-owner in possession sat with his wife under the limes before his house-door, a friendly chat was sure to ensue. In times of need, too, hands were joined, and common cause was made. During the years of war, from 1807 to 1813, no blood relations could have held together more firmly, or been truer one to the other, than the proud Derenbergs and the Ervings of the paper-mill.

When old Aunty first came to the house, two children had been born to the then proprietor—a girl, who was about her own age, and a boy some four years older. The three grew up in close intimacy. The mistress of the mill—a woman housewifely as she was pious—insisted indeed that the little orphan girl,

who had been taken from a day-labourer's cottage, should be kept to her own station in life. She was to be well-trained, it was said, and later on to act as maid to the Mill household; but Frau Erving neither could, nor would, prevent the children from playing together, and a warm friendship sprang up between the girls, which grew in strength with each succeeding year. The boy, on the other hand, was the sworn ally and comrade of the two sons now growing up at the Castle, and Baroness Derenberg loved the fair, curly-headed youngster so well that she persuaded his parents to let him share her sons' instruction. So little Fritz left the village school, exchanging it for the study of the great baronial house, and hard would it have been to find a more apt or grateful scholar than he approved himself.

Years later, when the Derenberg youths had reached man's estate, and long ago had made the grand tour in foreign parts, when the elder had entered into possession of the property bequeathed to him by his father, and the younger had become a dashing cavalry officer, they still came gladly to the old house where lived their friend. Little Lisette, meanwhile, had shot up into a tall and stately maiden. The proverbial beauty of the mill-owners' daughters was hers in the highest degree, and so winning was the look of her great blue eyes, deep and blue as the lake in the Derenberg forests, that obdurate indeed would have been the heart that could have withstood their charm. Marie too had grown straight and tall as a poplar—a proper lass, as the mistress said. She sang and danced through her work in kitchen and cellar, and was so

merry and sweet-tempered withal, that no one could have been otherwise than kind to the blithesome, red-cheeked maiden. True, she was now expected to address her former playmate as "Mamsell" but in private the familiar "Lisette" came readily back to her lips; and many and many a summer evening the two would sit with their arms round each other's waist, closely nestling together in the jessamine bower down by the water, as they had so often sat in the old childish days.

About this time it was that a heavy blow fell on the Mill household; a blow so heavy that the elders, bending beneath it, felt their strength fail them, and well-nigh broke down beneath the weight of trouble, and Marie, gay, light-hearted Marie, was suddenly transformed into a grave and silent maiden. Misfortune

overtook the jewel of the family, beautiful Lisette. Often, no doubt, had the poor child heard from her mother, who was versed in such words of wisdom, the old saying :—

“ Like fortune, like birth, like years,
Make the best friends and the happiest pairs ; ”

but how was she to think of this when her young heart was suddenly invaded by the strong passion which knows nought of rank or class differences? She loved for the first time, devotedly, entirely, with all the innocent trustfulness of a child; and the love which was given her in return was not less earnest, less pure in intent, than her own. But a strange hand interfered roughly, and by a wicked act crushed the budding blossom of their happiness. It was a white and delicate lady's hand, but it tore the two hearts apart with such ruthless violence, that

one bled to death from its wounds—after a short, sharp illness, Lisette closed her wonderful blue eyes on this world for ever.

From that hour all relations ceased between the Castle and the Mill. When poor grief-stricken Marie caught sight of the young lord, riding gaily through the forest glades by the side of his beautiful wife, the girl would sigh and say to herself, “She comes from fickle, light-minded Italy. How can she tell the feelings of a German heart, when it loves any one so dearly, so dearly? But a day of retribution will come!”

All this had happened years and years ago, and the men and women who had then lived at the Mill were all long since dead—with one exception. Marie, the orphan, had grown old beneath the Ervings’ roof. She still lived with them,

beloved and respected as though she had been one of their race.

Friedrich Erving, the present owner—nephew to the beautiful Lisette—had found in her a second mother. His own parents dying young, she had taken him to her true heart, and reared him tenderly. Under her care he had grown up strong, healthy, and happy; and when in the process of time he in his turn brought home a wife, she met the bridal pair on the threshold of the old home and gave them a hearty welcome. The young husband, greeting her affectionately, put his newly-won treasure into her arms. “There, Aunty,”—for so he always called her—“you must love her a little too now, and be a mother to us both.”

And so it had been. One day old Aunty stood in the ancient village church,

holding at the baptismal font a little daughter born to the young couple. Looking down, she saw a pair of great blue eyes wide open and gazing up at her. Tears of joy fell on the child's white robes, and an earnest thanksgiving for all the happiness now accorded to her, winged its way to Heaven. The little one received the name of Lizzie.

About this time occurred that catastrophe which filled the Castle with mourning, and powerfully affected all the dwellers at the quiet Mill. News was brought of Baron Derenberg's sudden death. Aunt Marie sat silent at her wheel, and thought reverently how God's mill always grinds with even justice.

One day, not long after this, her darling four-year-old Lizzie came tripping over the bridge hand in hand with another fair, curly-headed mite of about her own

size. In their rear appeared a beautiful boy, with raven hair and dark defiant eyes, who, at sight of her, took to playing shyly with his little wooden whip. She rose to meet them, lifted the baby-girl in her arms, and asked if she did not live up at the Castle. The little one nodded "Yes," upon which she carried the child into the parlour to the young mistress of the Mill. Then, taking the boy by one hand and her own Lizzie by the other, she led them in too; and both women, the young and the old, kissed and fondled the small fatherless children, until at length the baby-girl put her little arms about the old woman's neck, and nestled to her, and the boy advanced with bright, flashing eyes to take the apple she held out to him.

As the young visitors trotted homewards again over the bridge, the brother

carefully guiding his sister's steps, both the little heads were turned again and again to nod back their good-bye.

Great tears welled into the young mother's eyes, and she pressed her child to her heart, saying, "We must thank our good God to-night that my little one has her father left, such a kind, dear father! See, those poor children yonder have lost theirs. Ah, they are to be pitied for so many, many things!"

The friendship between young Lizzie and the Derenberg children dated from that day.

Life had gone on smoothly at the Mill. Lizzie bloomed more brightly day by day. She was a good steady little maiden, assiduous at her books, and apt at learning. The pastor, who was her father's friend and her godfather, took charge of her general education, and the pastor's

wife spoke French with her, and gave her singing-lessons. When the little lassie sang the popular ballads of the country in her clear flexible young treble, old Aunt's eyes would grow moist with tears. "Just Lisette over again!" she would say to herself under her breath.

That Armand should abstain from coming to the Mill, now that he had become a fine, full-fledged officer, hardly surprised the old woman. "It is his grandmother's blood in him," she said. But Lizzie would not believe that Army could have grown proud—Army, the old comrade and play-fellow, with whom, not so very long ago, she had laughed and chattered unrestrainedly. She would go and ask himself, thought Lizzie; so she set off towards the Castle, and, as has been seen, met the brother and sister under the great lime-tree by the way-

side. Army was in the very act of departing, but then it was all so easily explained. He had been forced to start on his journey quite suddenly, otherwise he certainly would have come. When she got back to the snug warm room at home, she went straight up to the old woman who was spinning busily, and said in a tone of triumph—

“Well, Aunty, it is not true, not true a bit, that Army has grown proud. He *could* not come because he had to go away again in a hurry. I knew it was so very well.”

“Oh, is that it?” said the old woman.

“Yes. You wicked old Aunty, you really gave me quite a fright,” she pouted.

“Well, well, the egg will be wiser than the hen! So Nelly said he meant to come?”

“Yes; and Nelly would not tell a lie.”

“Nelly is a good child. I am always pleased when she comes; she has the true Derenberg face, and the Derenberg nature. They were all honest and true as steel, were the Derenbergs, until that . . .” she paused.

“What do you mean, Aunty?”

“When the devil wants to work people harm, he puts on a face like an angel’s.”

“What *are* you talking about?”

“Nothing, that is, nothing which concerns you. I am talking to myself; but you may depend on it, Lily, it is as the pastor said last Sunday in the pulpit: ‘Our God is a just God.’ That is a true word. Now don’t stare at me with those great wondering eyes. You have got something better to do. Go and look in the oven on the second shelf. There are some fine roasted apples in there waiting for you.”

CHAPTER IV.

Two years and more had passed over the land. It was a May evening now. Through the open lattice of Aunt Marie's little room came a delicious air laden with sweet scents. A soft breeze played among the young leaves and tendrils of the vine which framed the casement, and the moon cast its silvery gleam over the clean white boards and simple furniture of the little chamber. Its light fell full on the wrinkled face of the old woman who sat at the window, her busy hands for once lying idly in her lap, looking out into the garden where the apple

and elder trees were just in their finest bloom. Old Aunty was keeping blind man's holiday. No lamp was to be lighted now in these long evenings—such was the good old custom in her part of the country. It is so pleasant to sit down and rest; not only the hands, but the mind. Resting, indeed, the old woman's thoughts were not. They had travelled back into the past to bright, far-distant days. It was a joy and refreshment to her, after the heat and burden of the day, to sit alone in this twilight hour and recall the loved memories of those times. The house was in perfect order; everything had been cared for and arranged. On this balmy spring evening the present faded from Aunt Marie's sight, and the season of her youth came back to her, fair and fragrant as the moon-lit world without.

Old Aunty folded her hands, and turned her head from the window back into the room. Her eyes sought a little portrait which hung over the chest of drawers; there, in the bright moonlight, the silhouette of a man's head could clearly be distinguished.

“Yes, yes, my poor Christian,” she said softly. “We were fond of each other, right fond, though you were with me but a short time. I have never forgotten you, and I have remained true to you to this day. To think that such a fate should betide you! Sad, sad! Heavenly Father, what trouble one may live through in one's little span! Just a smooth year or so, and then sorrow and care by the bushel! Lord, Lord, what a pair of merry girls we were, Lisette and I! and just when we thought things were looking their bravest, the weeping

was at hand. Ah, well-a-day—my Lisette and my poor old Christian !” She shook her head sorrowfully, for before her there arose the vision of two verdant, grass-grown mounds lying out yonder in the shade of the churchyard limes.

Suddenly a branch of elder bloom came flying into the room, and fell just into her lap. A gleeful laugh was heard outside.

“Now, now, there’s my Lily,” said Aunt Marie, and a roguish smile beamed on the old face, chasing the sad look from it. She sat quite still, hiding back in her armchair.

Next minute a girlish head, with a crown of dark plaits, appeared at the window, and peered curiously in.

“She is not there,” said the newcomer, in a disappointed tone, and then uttered a shrill little cry, for old Aunty

jumped forward in her chair, and brushed the girl's startled face gently with the elder-branch.

"Oh, Aunty, how wicked! What a shame to frighten me so!"

"Hey, what? Who was frightened first, pray?" returned the old woman, briskly. "Why, you mischievous little monkey, you play tricks and then pretend to be injured, do you?"

The girl made no reply to this, but asked—

"Have father and mother come back yet from town?"

"Not yet. It will be eleven, I dare say, before they get home. Go to bed, and sleep quietly. I will sit up for them."

"Go to bed? Aunty, what can you be thinking of? On such a wonderful evening as this? Come out a little, and

smell how delicious the air is, now all the elder-trees are in bloom. You can't think how splendid it is out in the garden to-night!"

"Ah, child, that won't do for me now; old people must not ape the young. It is damp out in the open air, and there's my tiresome rheumatism to think of. But you stay outside and enjoy the beautiful evening."

"No, I shall come in to you then, Aunty. May I? I can't stay all alone this evening, I can't really."

"Well, come in then, you foolish little thing."

The head disappeared from the window, and shortly afterwards the door opened, and a tall and slender maiden, clad in a light summer dress, entered the room.

"Here I am, Aunty," she cried gaily, sitting down on a little stool at the old

woman's feet. The moonbeams fell on a delicate oval face, and revealed a pair of marvellous deep-blue eyes, which were turned entreatingly upwards.

"Aunty," she said, softly, "tell me something this evening; do please."

"What! am I to tell stories to a great girl like you?"

"No, no, not a story. Something about your own young days, Aunty."

"About my young days? What about them?"

"Oh, Aunty, tell me how you felt when you had seen your sweetheart for the first time."

"Why, you . . . you curious thing! you are too young to know everything yet. Why should I begin to talk about that?"

"But I am seventeen, Aunty. Other girls are engaged to be married long before they are as old as I am, and . . ."

“Now, now, think of this! You will be wanting a sweetheart of your own soon, I suppose. Ah, ah! when I tell your mother what you have been saying . . .”

“You may tell her, Aunty,” cried the girl, laughing. “Mother herself showed me, oh, ever so much linen a little while ago, and said, ‘That is all for your outfit when you are married, Lily!’”

“Well, that is true, I must own. But what was it you wanted to know?”

“I want you to tell me how it was you met your poor Christian for the first time.”

The old woman paused, taken aback, as it seemed, by this sudden request, and the young girl sat looking up at her with great, dewy, glistening eyes. All was very still around. No sound reached them save the low, melodious ripple and

plash of the water as it flowed over the weir.

“ Three lilies, three lilies, planted on my grave!
There came a horseman bold and brave,
And he down from his saddle and pluckt them;”

sang a fresh young voice in the garden below. Aunt Marie raised her head to listen.

“ Why, that is Dora! How she can sing after the scolding she had to-day! But there, love and song will out. Hearts in May will have their say, and a piping bird will make itself heard.”

“ Ah, horseman, ah, horseman, let the lilies blow,
That my true love may see them once more, and
know
The grave where his love lies resting.”

“ Ay, ay, I have often sung the lilt myself in the days when I was young,” said old Aunty, nodding her head. “ Often have I sat down below in the jessamine bower with Lisette, and sung

from very blitheness of heart. She had such a rare sweet voice. But"—she broke off suddenly—"you wanted to know where I saw *him* for the first time. Well, listen. One evening—it was as fine an evening as this, but somewhat later in the year, in July about—I was going down the road which leads by the side of the park, singing—

‘Nor emperor, nor king is he,
But a brave soldier of low degree.’

when suddenly some one stepped out of the shady avenue, and said, ‘Why, lassie, must he be a soldier? Will nothing else do?’ I was so startled and frightened, I made no answer; but set off walking very fast. But he came after me, begging me, with many fair words, to forgive him. When I looked at him closer, and saw his dear good face and honest eyes, my fear left me, so we went on

together slowly. He told me that he was a groom up at the Castle, in the service of the young Baroness—she who is dowager now, you know, but who had then just come home as a bride—and that he had often looked out for me when he rode past the Mill, for you know I was maid here in the time of your great-grandmother. And I told him about myself—how I had neither father nor mother left, and when we got to the bridge yonder, we stopped and shook hands, and he said to me, ‘Good-night, Marie, my dear.’ Then we said no more, but stood a while quite still and silent, until at last I ran away over the bridge as fast as I could.”

“How did you feel then, Auntie?”

“Ah, I can hardly tell that myself now, Lily,” said the old woman. “But I mind that the moon shining over the

old mill had never looked to me so grand and golden, and that the sky seemed lifted somehow. I could not sleep all that night, and yet I was not a bit tired next day, and those words, 'Good-night, Marie, my dear,' sounded in my ears wherever I went."

The old woman looked down at her darling, and saw that great tears were glittering in the sweet blue eyes. "But tell me, my Lily, what it is that ails you."

"Oh, nothing ails me, Aunty," answered the girl. "Do you know, I think I will go outside a little, before the door. Father and mother must be here soon now. Good-night, Aunty!"

"Good-night, Lily! God bless you! But, child, if you go out early to-morrow morning to pick the asparagus, don't leave half of it standing, or I shall have

to see to it myself in future, ill as the work suits my old bones. Good-night."

And now the old woman was alone again in her little chamber. She closed the window, and, with a sorrowful shake of the head, went up to the chest of drawers. There she stood, gazing at her Christian's likeness. The moonbeams fell more obliquely now, and she could not see the little picture rightly; but every line of it was so familiar to her—she knew so exactly how it looked!

"Yes, so it was," she whispered; "out there by the bridge. There it all began. Love's memory is good. I remember it all as distinctly as if it were but yesterday evening we two were standing there. This is Lily's doing. I wonder what she really meant, the foolish young thing!"

Lizzie had sat down outside beneath

the lime-tree ; before her the mill-stream ran brawling on its course. Her eyes were fixed on the road which led, on the other side of the water, up to the Castle. Yonder, on the hill, behind the dark tree-tops, rose the proud towers of Derenberg, gleaming in the moonlight, as she had seen them times without number. How was it that she felt so strange and disturbed on this particular night ?

An unexpected meeting, which had occurred in the course of the day, had brought this about. She and Nelly had been sitting together in an arbour, reading to each other aloud, when, lo and behold ! Armand had suddenly stepped in upon them. His coming took them quite by surprise. After warmly embracing his sister, who had flushed scarlet with joy and could not articulate a word, he glanced over at her with evident

astonishment in his face, and at length addressed her as "Miss Lizzie." "Miss Lizzie!" how funny it sounded! She could not help laughing, and he laughed, too; but he persisted in so styling her. He had grown taller and more manly since that winter evening when she had said good-bye to him under the old snow-laden lime, and now a saucy little moustache graced his upper lip. How handsome he was! And the evening of Nelly's birthday—for such it was—had gone by so swiftly. They had revived all the old childish recollections, and he had been so bright and merry. His mother's face had shone, transfigured, as it were, with happiness. Then, when it was time for her to go home, he had insisted on bearing her company. They had come down the great avenue together, and taken the road to the

bridge, just as Aunty had done once upon a time with her Christian. They had talked of their childhood by the way. At the bridge he had stopped, saying, "Good-night, Miss Lizzie." Again she had broken into a little laugh. "Good-night, Mr. Army," she would like to have said; but the words would not out from her lips. Rather uncertainly she held out her small hand to him. He took it, as any old acquaintance might, then he turned and went; and she bent over the railings, and looked down on the glittering water, where the moonbeams played in trembling silver stripes, and listened to the nightingales in the old limes—all as in a dream.

"Will he come to the Mill this time, I wonder?" she asked herself, gazing over at the Castle towers. "Ah yes, surely! I do hope mother will not

choose to-morrow for that visit to the Inspector's wife she has talked about so long," thought she. "No, that would be too bad, for I should have to go too; I know I should."

So she sat musing under the old lime-tree that fair spring night, and the moon smiled gently down on her, careful, as it seemed, not to disturb those blissful young dreams. Old Dian knows they are frail and light as gossamer, and that it takes but a breath to destroy them.

Up at the Castle the yellow light of a lamp shone from the old Baroness's windows until far into the night. That lady, clad in her usual sombre robe, sat leaning back in her armchair, toying with the white handkerchief in her lap.

"And you say, Army," she began, keenly scrutinising the young officer seated opposite her; "you say Aunt

Stontheim herself expressed a wish that Blanche should pay us a visit here ? ”

“ Why, not exactly, Granny. That would be affirming too much,” replied the young man. “ Aunt Stontheim is a peculiar person. She never openly expresses a wish, in so many words ; but she mentioned one day that Blanche’s health had been somewhat tried by all the fatigue and excitement of the winter, and asked me if the air up here among our forests were bracing. Upon which, understanding the hint, I naturally made offer of our hospitality.”

“ That was over-precipitate of you, my dear Army. I must confess that to provide amusement for a young lady of fashion in this dreary, desolate place seems to me a formidable task. It shows a great want of tact on my Lady Stontheim’s part to accept your offer, es-

pecially for this Blanche. She will be able to go and relate to her father how Castle Derenberg entertains its guests." The old lady laughed a bitter laugh.

Armand remained silent. He was intently watching a butterfly, which was fluttering round the globe of the lamp.

"What is she like in appearance, this girl Blanche?" asked the grandmother after a pause.

A sunshiny light overspread Army's face.

"How shall I describe her appearance to you, Granny? All I can say is, Blanche is a wonderful creature, unlike any one else. She dazzles you when you first see her, and each time you behold her you discover something fresh in her which fascinates you more and more."

"That is a lover's mode of expression,"

remarked the old lady, coolly. "She never gave any promise of beauty, to my knowledge."

Armand flushed crimson beneath the cool survey of those great dark eyes.

"She is not beautiful exactly; but there is something about her . . ."

"Never mind that," interrupted the Baroness, impatiently. "Tell me what people think of her position with regard to her aunt; if she has anything to hope in that quarter."

"She passes for her aunt's sole heiress. During the fortnight I spent there at Christmas time I did not remark any special warmth of affection between the two."

The Baroness shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Have you told your mother the pleasing news of this intended visit?"

“No, neither my mother nor Nelly. They were not alone. The little girl from the Mill was with Nelly.”

“Of course. Really, it is incredible! I myself have, once for all, declined to have anything to do with her, but, unfortunately, she is first and last with your mother and sister, who look on her as a paragon of beauty and goodness. But, Army, where in the world are we to lodge this Blanche when she comes, and where am I to find the necessary attendance for her?”

“I thought of the rooms next yours, Granny, and the turret-chamber might be converted into a little sitting-room. The attendance Blanche will bring with her in the person of her own maid.”

“The turret-chamber! That she shall never have,” cried the old lady, starting

up. Her face, always pale, looked at this moment almost spectral in its extreme whiteness.

Armand stared at her, half alarmed at her sudden vehemence. "As you like, Granny."

"Settle that with your mother," she added, hastily. "Blanche may lodge where else she likes, but the turret-chamber will remain closed as long as I live. Go to bed now. We will talk more of this to-morrow."

Armand bent over her hand, and then left the room. Outside in the echoing corridor the bright moonlight shone, streaming through the many small panes of the lofty windows on to the white stone floor at his feet.

"Always the same old tune," he muttered. "What does all this mean about the turret-chamber, I wonder? And I

had pictured to myself how charming it might be made for Blanche."

"For Blanche!" He stood still a moment. His thoughts flew back to the great city, to an elegant villa with great plate-glass windows and a verandah filled with flowers. There on the second floor, behind those delicate lace curtains, she was, probably, at this moment, lying asleep. He went into his own room. The windows were open, and as he entered a swift current of air rushed in, laden with the scent of many blossoms. He stood looking out on to the moon-lit park, and as he so stood, the remembrance came to him of a certain winter evening when he had lingered in this same room. He had known nothing of life then, but he remembered how, thinking of the future, his mind had been beset by vague apprehensions, and how

the old legend on the fire-place yonder had strangely inspired him with hope and courage—

“Make God thy stay;
Luck cometh any day.”

Had luck come to him? Alas! no; not any great luck as yet; still, some rays of Fortune's sun had shone upon him, surely. In imagination, he saw himself sitting opposite his aunt Stontheim in her elegant drawing-room.

The old lady had sent him an invitation to spend last Christmas at D—— with her. He had gone reluctantly, and when he kissed the hand his aunt held out to him in token of welcome, his face had worn by no means an amiable expression. Tea had been served, and as the young man sat drinking it, the thought of the tedious hours before him weighed on his spirits like a nightmare.

Suddenly the *portières* were thrown back, and, wafted, as it were, into the room, there appeared a fair and youthful vision. The chandelier suspended from the ceiling threw its dazzling light on a fairy-like figure robed in gauzy pale green crape, which floated about her in undulating transparent waves. From these waves emerged a pair of delicate ivory shoulders. A golden fringe glistened on the low white forehead, and down the fairy's back, in unrestrained abundance, flowed a wealth of luxuriant golden-red hair.

He had sprung up, and stood gazing with wide, dilated eyes, as though he had seen a ghost. The young lady threw her splendid bouquet of white camellias on to a table, passed him quickly, and went up to greet her aunt.

“Agneta!” said a voice within him.

“The beautiful Agneta Maud from the portrait-gallery at home.”

“Is it so late?” inquired her aunt, surveying with a critical eye the charming apparition before her. Then, turning to her visitor, she added, “My dear Blanche, this is your cousin, Armand von Derenberg, who has come to spend Christmas with us.”

The young lady cast a rapid glance at him from a pair of dark eyes. He was still intently gazing at her—he could not help it. Surely she stood there in person, the beautiful Agneta Maud, as though she had just stepped out of her great gilt frame.

Yes, he had been very awkward. The hot blood rushed to his temples as he thought of it. The introduction over, he had, by his aunt’s desire, performed a hasty toilet, had taken his place opposite

the two ladies in the comfortable, well-appointed carriage, and with them had entered what seemed to him enchanted halls of light. There, with Blanche in his arms, he had glided over the smooth, mirror-like floors; he had talked to her, had told her how, in the gallery at home, there hung a portrait which might have been hers, and before which as a boy he had stood for hours in never-wearying, never-sated contemplation.

At this she had smiled, and declared she would like one day to put it to the test, to go and stand beside the portrait, just to see whether the likeness did not exist principally in his imagination. True, she had not the eyes—the deep, sorrowful eyes. Hers were dark also, but the unfathomable melancholy of the Lady Agneta's was not to be read in them. How could it be? What could

she know of sorrow or sadness? She so young, so bright, so much admired. He followed her with his earnest gaze, as she floated by him in the dance. Her streaming hair formed an aureole round her pale face, and fell like a shining golden veil about her shoulders. He never wearied of admiring it. He envied every other man who danced with her, and looked forward with satisfaction to the Christmas Eve he had expressly come to celebrate. That evening would certainly be spent quietly at home. But precisely on that occasion had she pleased him least. Not that she looked less charming than usual—by no means. The golden veil gleamed wonderfully, falling over a dress of dark blue silk. Woven through and through it were countless glittering sparks, fired by the candles of the Christmas tree, but the

beaming smile was wanting which lends true witchery to a face. No trace of true innocent Christmas mirth could he detect in Blanche's black eyes.

Then *fête* had followed upon *fête*, until at length he had been obliged to leave, hard as it was for him to say good-bye. He begged his aunt for permission to return speedily, and pressed into the breast-pocket of his tunic a little Russia-leather case, a keepsake from his cousin—more precious in his sight than the fairest jewel, for it contained a soft, long tress of woman's hair. She had given it to him in jest, at his earnest entreaty—in order, as she said, that he might compare the shades, and see which was most golden in its hue, that in the picture, or hers.

Armand was still standing by the open window in his dark room. He drew the

little case hastily forth, and, holding it in the moonlight, gazed at the long fair lock which was attached by a blue ribbon at either end. He pressed it to his lips, and a series of sweet, delicious fancies trooped through his mind. He saw himself here in the home of his fathers, she standing by his side. His arm was about her waist, and her bright head nestled on his breast. Outside in the desolate park, a sparkling shaft of crystal water shot aloft from the moss-grown granite basin, breaking the sad silence of years, announcing a new era of prosperity and happiness.

How fair was the dream! But then it was but a dream, and how great a contrast the reality! Armand shuddered. The dreary miserable reality brought claims upon him which almost alarmed him. Where should he find means for

the preparations he wished to make? If only by a little show and glitter, he could disguise from his beautiful guest the sad poverty reigning at Castle Derenberg! Oh, this money, this pitiful, wretched money!

Musing thus, he stood looking out into the park below. A night breeze had arisen, and stirred whispering among the trees. "It is time to sleep," thought the young enthusiast; and quitting his post with quiet tread, he sought his couch. In his dreams the beautiful Agneta Maud appeared to him, standing before him in her dress of silver brocade, over which floated a sort of golden veil. She looked at him with her great mournful eyes, and raised her hand warningly.

"Beware! Look to the haire!
If redde, be sure 'twill prove a snare,"

sounded in his ears mysteriously.

CHAPTER V.

“ARMY, how glad I am to think we are going to have a visitor for once,” said Nelly to her brother next morning. “What will Lizzie say? I must let her hear the news. Do tell me, Army,” she pleaded coaxingly, clinging fast to his arm; “what do you think of Lizzie? Has not she grown lovely?”

“Really, I don’t know,” he replied absently. “I have not thought about it. Yes, I suppose she has, but I hardly remember . . .”

“Why, Army, what ails you?” ex-

claimed his sister. "You are preoccupied, or out of spirits. Has anything unpleasant happened? Can I help you?"

"No, little sis," he laughed, and playfully stroked her blooming face; "you are the last person in the world who can help me. It is a bad business. I am half afraid to tell my mother, but tell her I must . . ."

"Oh, don't say anything to mamma," entreated the young girl, stopping, and laying her little hand on her brother's shoulder, while she looked anxiously up in his face. "Pray, pray don't. She is so weak and ill, and she is always crying. Don't tell her, if it is anything disagreeable."

Some slight embarrassment was visible in Armand's face.

"But, good heavens, what am I to do? I can't go to Granny. It would

be useless if I did, for she is not in a position to . . . to . . .”

“Army,” whispered the girl, guessing the cause of his trouble—and, as she spoke, she came close up to him, “I think I can help you. Wait one moment; or no, go on till you come to the great maple by the pond. I will be there in a minute. And she sped away from him, back along the shady walk, the sunbeams glancing over her simple light frock and fair head. At the first turn of the alley she disappeared.

The young man stood a while, looking after her, then he walked on. What did she mean, he wondered. She could not possibly know. He sat down on a stone seat, and looked over at the clear water, where the blue sky and tall trees were all faithfully mirrored. “How delightful it is here!” he said to him-

self. "If she has the least perception of the beauty of Nature, it must please her."

A light step sounded behind him. Turning, he looked into his sister's face, all flushed and beaming with pleasure.

"There, Army," she said, blushing a deeper carnation, and putting a pretty little silk purse into his hand. "I don't want it, really I don't. What should I want it for? And you won't say anything to mamma, will you?" Joy sparkled in the girl's blue eyes—joy at having something to give. "Dear old Army, put it away at once," she begged. "I am sure it will be enough."

"No, Nelly, no," he cried, crimson now, in his turn, "I won't take your savings, my dear . . ."

She laid her hand on his mouth. "You will make me angry, Army. If

brother and sister may not help each other, who may? Who knows, I may come to you some day. Now let us go on, and say no more about it. See, what do you think? Suppose we had a boat here? I have wished for one ever so long. Then we could row out on the lake with Blanche . . . and Lizzie. Blanche won't be proud, dear, will she?"

He made no reply. At this moment he seemed to himself a pitiful fellow. He turned his face away hastily.

His sister noticed this. "Army," said she, "come in soon. I must go back now to mamma to . . . to . . ." She could not think of any pressing business with her mamma—"and I am in a great hurry," she wound up abruptly, and started off, taking the nearest way back to the Castle.

He followed her slowly, oppressed by a feeling of shame he had never known before. Yesterday he had not even brought her a trifle for her birthday, and now she joyfully gave him all her little treasure. He stopped and opened the small silk purse. There were a few thalers in it loose, and something wrapped in white paper. He unfolded the little packet, and found a gold piece; on the paper were a few words written in his mother's hand. "To buy a new dress for my Nelly," he read. The girl had evidently not noticed the words, or she would have spared him this humiliation. He thought of the washed-out cotton frock she had worn yesterday, and again that morning. How delighted she must have been at the idea of having a new dress! A new dress for five thalers! That was precisely the sum

he had given lately for a bouquet to send to Blanche, a bouquet which she, no doubt, had carelessly thrown aside on the morning after the ball. He thought of the graceful figure he had invariably seen draped in costly silks, or wreathed in clouds of airy tarletane. What contrasts there are in life ! There, before him, stood the Castle, the grand old mansion with its imposing façade and proud towers, and he, the son of so noble a house, had not even where-withal to . . . Ah, the thought of it nearly drove him mad !

He turned hastily and retraced his steps. His eyes involuntarily wandered over the wooded background, and rested on the sloping slate-tiled roof of the paper-mill. Suddenly he laughed out loud. " Yes, they have grown wealthy," he said to himself. " One must take to

rags, or something of the sort, nowadays ; then the money will flow in in abundance. All that fortune will go to the little girl I used to play with—Lizzie of the Mill is the richest heiress of these parts ! Really, it is too frightfully ludicrous to see how things are ordered in this world.” But there was no sign of real mirth in his dark eyes ; he looked terribly depressed and down-hearted, this handsome young officer. His sister’s money seemed to scorch his hands, as he walked on rapidly with lowered head and lips scornfully set. All his bright dreams of the future had fled before the carking cares of the present, and the hardships of his pecuniary position were making themselves felt in full force. He took the little slip of paper on which his mother’s words were written, and placed it in his pocket-book. Then he

went on again and, turning into the broad walk, descried old Henry, who was hastening towards him as fast as his aged limbs would permit.

“My lady, your grandmamma, begs you to come to her at once, Lieutenant,” he said, looking up into the young man’s troubled face with kindly sympathising eyes as he delivered his message.

The old Baroness was pacing up and down her room. A slight delicate flush overspread her proud face, and her dark eyes glanced ever and anon impatiently towards the red hangings of the door through which her grandson must enter. In her hand she held an open letter, and from time to time she would pause and look at the paper.

“It is incredible,” said she in a low voice. “To think of these Königsburg Derenbergs getting such a footing there !

Dio mio, what pills my Lady Stontheim gives me to swallow in this short note. And yet we must thank God that matters have taken this turn. How glad I am that, in spite of the coolness existing between us, I insisted on Army's going to pay his respects to her." She cast another glance at the letter.

"I found Armand amiable and well-mannered, a young gentleman of the true Derenberg stamp, and though our acquaintance is but short, I have grown really and heartily fond of him."

The old lady's lip curled disdainfully.

"I am, as you will remember of old, one of those persons who speak their mind honestly and straightforwardly. We two never could understand each other, owing, no doubt, to the very great difference existing in all our views and ways of thought. But now, my dear Baroness,

that we have both grown to be old women it surely is time to make our peace for the short span of life that is left to us. I hold out the olive-branch to you. Let bygones be bygones. There were faults, I dare say, on both sides. And now I must confide to you a pet scheme of mine which concerns Armand. You will doubtless have heard from him that I have a young relation living with me, a motherless girl, whom I, in my loneliness, have taken to be as a daughter to me, and whom I love as though she really were my own child. If I am not much mistaken, Armand looked on his cousin with no indifferent eyes. I should be sincerely rejoiced if the two were to fall in love, and, in order to give the man opportunity of so doing, I am sending Blanche to you under the pretext that your forest air will prove beneficial to her health.

May the two young hearts grow mutually attached, so that I may one day find a son in Armand. You are a wise and prudent woman, my dear Baroness, and I need not beg you to give the young people no hint of my wishes on this subject. My hope is that they may be drawn together by a real and true affection. It is possible that Blanche may have some notion of my plan in her sage little head. I have communicated to her nothing of it. And now we must leave the rest to the Almighty, trusting that He may work it out in accordance with our desires. Again in imagination tendering to you the hand of peace, and hoping for a speedy answer,

“I am, dear Baroness,

“Yours,

“ERNESTINE, COUNTESS STONTHEIM,

“*née* DERENBERG.”

“Quite grandiose, I declare,” remarked the old lady; “and we must put a good face on it, and look as if we liked it. It is a clever stroke of Madame Stontheim’s, but she was always cunning. Blanche is her heiress, that is clear, and now she has got to know the boy, she would like to arrange the matter amicably. I must look sweet, and bite the sour apple offered me, thanking Heaven it is there to bite. She is a spiteful, malicious creature, my lady Stontheim! But I must give the lad a hint. It would appear that he is not indifferent to the charms of this Blanche, and . . .”

At this moment Armand entered the room. His grandmother nodded to him kindly.

“I have got a letter from your aunt Stontheim,” said she, stopping and holding out her hand to him. “It is to

announce Blanche's speedy arrival; and now, dear, forget that I ungraciously opposed your plans last night. I had a slight touch of headache, and you know that always puts me out of temper. I am really pleased at the thought of the young lady's visit."

Armand, who had bent his curly head over her outstretched hand, looked up with beaming eyes into his grandmother's face. "Really, Granny? Thank you; you take a mountain-load off my mind. I was annoyed to think that a troublesome burden was being laid upon you. May I know what my aunt says in her letter?"

The old lady smiled. "No, my dear," said she. "It is not good to hear too flattering a report of one's self."

"Aunt likes me?" he asked with considerable animation, twirling his saucy little moustache.

“Your aunt thinks you are a sensible, good-hearted young fellow, and you will one day show yourself a Derenberg of the true old type.”

Armand's face fell. “Is that all?”

“Especially if you should chance to be blessed with a lovely wife whom you adore,” hinted his grandmother, roguishly.

“Does she say that?” he cried in a glow of excitement, hastily seizing her hand. “Best of grannies, be good to me. Tell me if she mentions anything about her, about Blanche. Does she think Blanche cares for me?”

“Army! How very indelicate! Compose yourself, pray. Who is talking about Blanche? I have said nothing, not a word, you understand? Who is dreaming of such a thing? Why, you are barely one and twenty!”

But Armand had his arm round his

grandmother's neck, and in spite of her resistance, managed to imprint two hearty kisses on her cheek; after which he rushed out of the room in most unceremonious fashion.

“*Orribile!*” said the old lady, settling her lace cap. “He must be frightfully in love with her already. If Madame Stontheim had seen him just now, she would have her doubts as to his possessing the true Derenberg character.”

She paused a while and meditated, searching, as it seemed, for something in the past of which the late scene with her grandson had vaguely reminded her. Suddenly a bright memory flashed upon her, a memory from happier days. She saw herself, as a young and beautiful girl, throwing her arms round the half-blind duenna and kissing her eagerly in an ecstasy of delight. Wherefore? Because out

yonder in the balcony, under the blooming oleanders, in the soft evening air, a slender, fair-haired man had been relating to her in strange, foreign-sounding Italian many things of his distant home, telling her of an old German castle girt round with verdant oak-forests, of an old German lady with blue eyes and kindly face. A gentler expression stole over her features, as she remembered the happy tumult of her young heart on that night. "He has my blood in his veins," she said. "God grant a better fulfilment to his wishes than mine have met with." Then she sat down in the chair before the writing-table, and let her thoughts roam onwards, picturing to herself a bright future, the rosy dawn of which already faintly coloured the horizon. And as she so sat dreaming, the old Castle appeared before her again,

invested with all the glamour of long bygone days.

Meanwhile Armand was rushing about the park in a state of high excitement. Meeting his sister on his way downstairs, he had hugged her almost to suffocation, and had talked unintelligibly about a new dress, a blue one such as Blanche wore. To his mother, who was quite at a loss to understand her son's wild spirits, he had chattered of mineral baths; how necessary it would be for her to try their effect on her shattered health, and how she certainly must pass a season at some watering-place, if not that year, without fail the next. After this he had gone with his sister and old Henry to inspect the rooms he had chosen for Blanche, and had ordered here and commanded there. Nelly had been obliged to promise her little work-table, and her mother's

flower-stand. Then he had found fault with the curtains and pictures, had seen the latter taken down and others hung in their place, and had repeatedly declared to Nelly that he would have carpets and curtains sent from his garrison-town to replace these old worn-out things. A new suit of livery for Henry was also to be forthcoming. Finally, he had caught his sister round the waist, and anxiously asked her if she did not think Blanche would be sure to like the place a little—if if she did not agree with him that this room had the best prospect; adding in the same breath—“ Ah, little one, how astonished you will be when you see her, how astonished you will be ! ” And now he was out in the old park, wandering about the grass-grown walks, longing for the hour when he might start on his journey to her, to tell her how pleased

they all were at home at the thought of seeing her.

At length, at length, evening came, and he made ready for his departure. After a short leave-taking, a few words spoken out of a full heart, "Good-bye for a little while—we shall have a pleasant meeting soon, I hope;" he went out into the balmy spring night, and strode away down to the village to take his place in the mail-coach. At the park gates he plucked a branch of lilac in full bloom; it would be like a message from his home to Blanche. Then the post-boy blew his horn, and he was carried away through the sleeping country, his wakeful mind busy with a thousand blissful thoughts.

Down at the Mill a window was opened gently, and a brown head looked out, gazing with longing, tearful eyes over at

the high-road. Lizzie knew that he was to leave that evening. He had told her so himself, and she had waited, and waited for him the whole day long—but he had not come—and hark! that was the post-horn note ringing out through the still night. What a sad sound it had! A faint responding echo was wafted back from the forests, and softly, very softly, she closed the window again.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT day brought a change of weather. The sky was all one leaden grey, and a fine continuous rain fell, drowning the glory of the apple-blossoms and the lilacs. In the afternoon Lizzie betook herself to her own little room, and standing there, looked sorrowfully out over the dripping garden, to the heights where the Castle towers loomed grey and indistinct, wrapped in a shadowy veil of mist.

Everything had gone wrong that day. Every one had looked cross and disagreeable. Her father had had some unpleasantness in the business ; Aunty was out

of temper, because Dolly had not shut the stable-door, behind which the turkey-hen and her seven chicks resided. In consequence of this, there they all were paddling about in the rain, a thing contrary to all rule and precedent. The little creatures would die, every one of them, she prophesied. She felt as sure of it as if she saw them all sitting in a row and turning up their eyes. Dolly had had a famous scolding, and had crept about the house with red eyes and a woe-begone face. Then, to make matters worse, a visitor had arrived— young Herr Selldorf, who was coming to be with her father in the business, and he had dined with the family. In general, the *employés* took their meals in the other house where they lived, for Herr Erving did not like any intrusion on his own home; but in this case he made an ex-

ception for once, the young man's father being an old and very intimate friend. So the young gentleman with the curly light hair and the great blue cravat had taken his seat opposite Lizzie at table, and had stolen looks at her from time to time, which was certainly very unnecessary; and all through the dinner the talk had been of Herr Selldorf the elder, of the state of the business, and of Frau Selldorf's health—it had all been so tiresome and tedious! Added to this, Lizzie had forgotten to feed her doves, for the first time since the duty had devolved on her, and this made her feel angry with herself. What could be the matter with her? Then she remembered how the day before she had sat with her work under the great lime before the house-door, until it grew quite dark, and how every time a figure appeared up yonder

among the trees, she had been startled, and her heart had begun to beat violently. But each time it had turned out to be quite an ordinary person who was coming down the road—once it was even Weidner's old Polly, who was always going begging. At last, she had run away upstairs, had sat down and cried.

She shook her head in vexation, as she had to confess it to herself, and blushed again and again, as she remembered that she had got out of bed last night, because her thoughts would not let her rest, and had opened the window to listen for the post-horn, which the coachman on the box would sound as he set off with his passenger, Army—yes, with Army, who was leaving them all so soon again!

“What a pity it is such horrid weather!” she murmured to herself, taking down a volume of Geibel's poems

from the bookshelf. "Nelly would surely be coming down, but for that." She sat down on the little sofa, leaned her head on her hand, and turned over the pages of the book, giving no more than a fleeting glance at the graceful little songs she was generally so fond of reading. Then she raised her head quickly, and turned a listening ear towards the door. Yes, sure enough—that was Aunty's familiar step coming across the hall. Next minute the kind old face, framed in its snow-white cap, looked in at the door.

"For goodness' sake, where are you, child?" asked Aunt Marie, panting for breath. "You have been looking as sour as vinegar all day, and now you are sitting up here reading, instead of coming to help poor old Aunty a bit; you know it is Thursday, and the pastor's people are coming. That Dolly is as cross as

two sticks because of the scolding she got to-day, and Mina is sulking to keep her company. You might have come and given a helping hand with the pigeons, or peeled the asparagus. It is not over easy to do, and you ought to learn all these things. You will want them in the future, for where a mistress is her own housekeeper, there will be fitches on the rafters. But, dear me, what a pretty place you have here! It is quite a pleasure to see it!" she broke off, surveying the charming little room—which, with its varnished white furniture covered with blue and white striped chintz, and its airy window curtains, was indeed exactly what a maiden's chamber should be. "And just see how that myrtle there is growing. Ah, yes, that reminds me what I came upstairs for. Here is something Nelly has written

to you. Old Henry brought it over." She took a little note from the leathern pocket she wore under her apron, and gave it to Lizzie, who opened it quickly and read its contents.

"Only think, Aunty," cried she in surprise, "they are going to have a visitor up at the Castle; Nelly is half wild with delight. It is a cousin, Blanche von Derenberg, they are expecting; Army is coming home on leave, and I am to go up as often as possible to see them."

"Oh?" said the old woman.

"Yes; Nelly says she should have come to tell me all about it, but she has not time to-day. She has to stay and help to get the rooms ready."

"They have only just heard of it, I suppose?" remarked old Aunty.

"Oh no," said Lizzie. "Nelly writes that it was for that Army came."

“Army has been here?” asked Aunt Marie in surprise, with a quick look at the young girl, who had suddenly blushed red as a peony. “When did he come?”

“On Nelly’s birthday,” was the answer, given in rather a small voice.

“Now think of that! And you never said a word about it, Lily—you who always tell me everything.” There was a touch of anxiety in the old woman’s tone. “Say, Lily, why did you keep it back?” she asked again, quickly.

“Because I did not want to hear you talking about his having grown proud and haughty . . .”

“And why don’t you like to hear that, Lily?”

“Because it is not true, because he had not time, or he would have come . . .”

Suddenly she broke out crying. All

her disappointment of the day before found vent in a rush of bitter tears.

“But, Lily, my darling, what does all this mean? It is not right to cry for such a thing as this. What in the world is Army to you?” The old woman spoke in a chiding tone, but it was plain that a great load had fallen on her heart. “I should think it cannot matter to you how I speak of Army. Your ways and his ways run apart now, it is not like when you were children. He is a great gentleman now, and you are a grown-up woman. What is one to think, if you begin to cry in this silly way?”

But Lizzie threw her arms round the old woman's neck, “Oh, Aunty, don't be angry with me,” she sobbed; “it is very childish of me, I know, but I can't bear to hear you speak of them up at the Castle as you do. You see, we have

always been such good friends, and have played together always, and I feel as if you were unmercifully crushing out all the pleasant old memories when you say cross things of Army and Nelly."

Aunt Marie shook her head. "Child," she said then, "you don't know what bitter trouble once came to this house from the Castle up yonder."

"Can Army and Nelly help that?"

"No, but . . ."

"You say yourself we ought to forgive our enemies."

"That is true, but it is a hard task to forgive a wrong which comes home to one as that did . . ."

"Ah, don't say anything more about it, Aunty," pleaded Lizzie coaxingly, smiling through her tears up into the other's wrinkled face. "I won't cry again in this absurd way, but you will

promise me, won't you, not to scold any more. I will come down now, and help to roast the pigeons nice and brown and crisp, as father likes them, shall I? And have you got the young radishes out of the garden, or shall I go and gather them?" So she went on begging and coaxing, until the old woman pressed a kiss on her rosy mouth, and they went together across the darkening landing of the upper storey, where mighty old wardrobes and linen presses were ranged along the walls. Old Aunty involuntarily looked over at one of the doors opposite, and heaved a piteous sigh.

"That used to be Lisette's little bedroom," said she, with some emphasis on the words.

The young girl nodded, and sprang down the stairs. She had often heard "Lisette" spoken of, and knew that her

great-aunt had borne that name, which old Marie never pronounced without a certain solemnity of accent; but as no particulars respecting Lisette's fate or fortunes had ever been communicated to her, she did not feel any great interest in knowing where she had slept. She felt ashamed, too, now of having cried like a baby before old Aunty. What would she fancy? Perhaps that she, Lily, cared for . . . Lizzie did not follow out her thought, but ran away singing, down to the parlour to say good evening to the pastor and his wife.

Old Marie's eyes followed her with a troubled look. "Holy Father!" she murmured, "in Thy mercy spare us a second such misfortune. For a misfortune it would be! No good thing has come from up yonder, since that foreign woman has lived at the Castle. Lord

Almighty, keep the girl's thoughts from wandering. She does not know it herself yet, but it is true, I could hear it! She is fond of Army. Oh Lord, Lord, what can be done to stop it?"

So old Aunty pondered and pondered, as she helped to prepare the supper in the spotless kitchen. As Lizzie's clear tones reached her ear from time to time, she shook her head mysteriously, and at supper-time she furtively watched the smiling face from which all trace of tears had vanished.

A cheerful, happy party it was which sat at the great round table in the cool dining-room where the snow-white cloth was laid. The master of the house, with his genial, handsome face framed in a full, well-grown beard; the pastor, whose beaming countenance betokened the pleasure it gave him to sit thus, an

honoured guest, beneath his old friend's roof; and the pastor's plump little wife, Rosina, who was always cheerful and sweet-tempered, though she had a flock of little children at home, rising one above the other like the pipes in an organ, and it was hard work often to find frocks and jackets for them all. Even on these Thursday evenings at the Mill, when she meant to rest and refresh herself after all the exertions of the week, she could not sit on the sofa beside the mistress without having a little sock in her hand at which she knitted away industriously. Not unfrequently Frau Erving, with a smile, would lay a whole packet of finished stockings in her lap, and say, "There, dear, I have helped you a bit. Now do put away that knitting for one evening, and sing us a song instead. And then Rosina would sing

some simple ballad in her gentle soprano ; but, directly it was over, she would take up the needles again mechanically, and say, smiling at herself, "Don't mind, Minnie. I really can't help it."

The mistress was feeling unusually well this evening, and was telling Rosina long stories of domestic and household management, and Lizzie joked and laughed merrily with her father and the pastor. Old Aunty alone seemed quiet and out of spirits. She had not even a smile for the praises her skill in cookery called forth, and tasted not a drop of the fragrant Moselle which sparkled so enticingly in the great green wine-glass before her.

"Do you know, pastor, I have got a son of your old school friend, Selldorf's, here?" said the master of the house.

"A lad of Selldorf's? You don't say

so! Now, how has the world used him?"

"He is at the head of some great chemical works over in Thuringia."

"Bless me! and the young man is to . . ."

"The young one has come to pry and poke about in my business, because his father intends to start a paper manufactory—vulgarly speaking, a rag-mill. He has had plenty of luck, has Selldorf. He went as book-keeper into the concern which is now his own, married the principal's only daughter, and became a made man. He has his wits about him, and is a thoroughly honest, genuine fellow. You must take a look at the lad. He is strikingly like what his father was in the old days—the same light, curly wig, the same eyes. I felt as if I had grown young again when I saw him standing before me."

“What have you done with him?”

“He is over at the house of business. I am not going to make a hair’s difference between him and the others. He had his dinner here with us to-day, but that’s enough. You know I like to be quiet with my own people at home.”

The pastor nodded. “Well, I must have a look at the boy, that’s certain. And what does Miss Lizzie say on the subject?” he asked of the girl, jestingly.

“Nothing at all, uncle,” answered she.

“Well, that is not much,” he laughed. “But, *à propos*, that reminds me, Lizzie, Army has been here. I saw him coming from the coach when he arrived. *A la bonne heure!* he has grown a fine young fellow, if you like. Have you seen him, little one?”

Lizzie nodded, but her face suddenly glowed with a deep crimson dye. Old

Aunty looked at her so sharply across the table.

“I can’t help feeling a little hurt, though, that he does not think it worth while to come down, and give us a call,” went on the worthy pastor. “It is not nice of him to ignore his old tutor. That is a bit of the old Baroness in him.”

“You are not the only one who has cause to complain,” said the mistress of the house. “He has not been here at the Mill either. But Nelly comes to see us.”

“A darling girl she is,” observed the pastor’s wife.

“For all the world like her grandfather,” broke in old Aunty’s voice. “That was a man for you! Well, well, whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth.”

“He had an unhappy time of it with

his wife, I suppose?" asked Rosina, turning to the old woman.

"Oh, ma'am, wherever she goes, trouble is sure to follow. She has not been content with ruining her own people, but she must bring sorrow and misery into the houses of others."

"Yes, she must have gone on in a reckless fashion," assented the minister. "One hears something of it from the villagers every now and then."

"My family could tell a tale thereof, could not they, Aunty?" said the master.

"Ah! that God Almighty knows," cried old Marie. "The tears that woman has caused to flow! But He has taken count of them all," she added, getting up quickly and going out of the room.

"It could do no harm," she murmured, when she reached her own little refuge, and once more thought over the subject

that was troubling her. "It could do no harm if I were to tell Lily the story. It might give her an inkling of what sort of people they are up yonder."

Then she rose, looked for a key which had been put safely away, went softly out towards the staircase, and opened the door of Lisette's chamber.

The room she entered was of small dimensions, and contained very simple furniture, which in the now gathering dusk could hardly be distinguished. Between the two windows stood a chest of drawers with brightly polished clamps and handles; above them was a looking-glass in a carved wood frame surmounted by a curious scroll. There was also a small bedstead painted green and ornamented with a gay garland of roses, and before it a tiny table, on three legs, with an inlaid star on the top; and against

the opposite wall stood a high-backed, spindle-legged sofa which fairly groaned as old Aunty sat down on it. Over the bed hung a little black crucifix under a brightly coloured print representing a girl with a dove on her hand. In the space between the bed and the window a small wardrobe, with inlaid figures of darker wood on the doors, had managed to squeeze itself in; whilst at the further window stood a work-table with a tall prie-dieu chair before it. Under the looking-glass was suspended a withered wreath, tied with a faded blue ribbon, which contrasted strangely with the fresh bunch of lilac set in the old cut tumbler on the drawers. This love-token Aunt Marie never failed to place there when the lilac trees were in bloom. The former tenant of this room had so loved the delicate mauve blossoms, and the

season of early spring always called up in the old woman's heart a series of recollections half sweet, half painful.

So, as she sat this evening in the chamber which had once been the beautiful Lisette's, different images rose before her, and past and present grew confused in her mind. She herself was a blithe young maiden again, and there at the window stood the slender figure of her friend, whose beautiful eyes were gazing lovingly over towards the south tower of the distant Castle. "He is coming, Marie, he is coming," the girl had often cried, clapping her hands in an ecstasy of joy. Then they had gone down into the garden together, and there, in the shady jessamine bower, a happy pair of lovers had sat and talked in all honour and chaste happiness.

And then ?

Then came a time when the lovely form lay stretched upon that bed, crushed and broken by the weight of affliction, the sweet cheeks colourless, the blue eyes wild with delirious excitement.

Was it not enough to have witnessed such misery once in a lifetime? "Oh, God, keep my darling, my Lily!" she prayed, laying her head against the back of the sofa. Her clasped hands sank down on her lap, and tears forced themselves into her weary eyes.

Suddenly two little hands took tight hold of her folded palms, a soft cheek was laid against hers, and when she looked up, she met a pair of deep-blue eyes earnestly fixed upon her, while a soft voice asked—

"Why are you crying, Aunty? Are you angry with me still?"

The old woman did not reply at once.

She almost felt as though some fair vision had appeared to her. But soon she asked, "What brings you here, Lily?"

"Forgive me, Aunty. I went to look for you downstairs in your own room. They are talking so much about a Baron Fritz and my great-aunt Lisette. I wanted to ask you if you would not tell me something about them, so I came after you here."

"You have come at a right time, Lily. Let them talk below. No one knows the tale as I do, for I lived through it all and saw it with my own eyes. I did mean that for a long while yet you should hear nothing of all the chances and changes of life, but perhaps it will be better for you . . . Come, sit down."

The young girl obeyed, casting a timid look about the room into which she had never glanced but once when she

was quite a little child—and the old woman stroked her apron smooth, and folded her hands again, making ready to speak. Yet she remained silent still, looking about her as though in some distressful doubt. Should she relate to this young creature the sad story, and sow the seeds of enmity and rancour and cruel distrust in this innocent soul? The maiden, sitting by her side in mute expectation, was but a child still—she would soon forget this nonsense about Army. No, she could not tell the piteous tale. And yet, if she were to live to see the thing repeated, to feel she had not warned her darling while there was yet time! “Oh, dear Lord,” she murmured, “what shall I do? what had I better do?”

“Open the window first, Lily,” she begged; “it is so close in here.”

The young girl threw the window wide open. It had ceased raining. A gentle drip, drip, from leaf to leaf might still be heard among the tall old trees, and there was borne into the room that fresh smell of earth which always fills the air after a heavy shower.

“Lily,” she said then, in a very low voice.

“Aunty?” asked the girl in reply, stroking the withered cheeks.

“Lily, I . . . I think it would be better for you not to go up to Nelly so often—by-and-by, I mean, when Army is there, and the cousin,” she added soothingly, as Lizzie turned her head quickly towards her with an expression of surprise. “You see, it is not . . . I think . . . I . . .” she stammered, and broke down.

“Don’t talk of that any more, tell me

about Lisette instead," pleaded the girl, coaxingly, fearing lest old Aunty should revert to the dreaded theme which had been broached that afternoon.

"About Lisette?" cried the old woman, hastily. "Well, I was going to tell you that she was the sweetest, dearest creature on God's earth, and that she lost her life, because . . . just because . . . Listen, Lily; if ever you hear an ill word spoken of your great-aunt, give it the lie at once, for there never was a purer heart, or one broken with more shameful, deliberate cruelty."

She paused a while.

"Don't go to the Castle any more, Lily," she went on, taking the girl's hand and pressing it fervently. "See, deary, I can't tell you exactly how it all happened. I can't bring myself to speak of it. You shall hear the story

some day; but, trust me, it is not well to cross the old Baroness's path . . . she . . ."

"Has that anything to do with the story of Aunt Lisette?" asked the girl. "Tell me, Aunty; tell me, do."

"I say neither No nor Yes, Lily," answered old Marie; "but this I do say," she added solemnly, "the end of all things has not come yet, and if matters went from bad to worse with her, and she were to come here as a beggar to the door, I would thrust her away, and give her neither bit nor sop—for when she crosses a threshold, a curse falls upon the house, a curse that will endure for aye and aye. And once before I die, I will yet tell her to her face that she is a . . ."

"Aunty!" exclaimed Lizzie, holding up her hand to stop her. It was such

a shocked little cry, that the old woman paused immediately.

“Well, well,” she murmured, “I will say no more. But you shall not be made miserable as poor Lisette was. I could not live through it again. Ah, mercy on us, child, I did not mean to make you grieve. I only meant to warn you, Lizzie,” she went on, drawing the sobbing girl to her breast. “You shall not be parted from your friend, not for all the world, my deary; but, you see, when one is young, all sorts of foolish fancies come into one’s head. Lizzie, child,” she whispered, anxiously, “you know I mean it for your good, don’t you, sweetheart?”

Lizzie nodded. “Yes, I know you mean it kindly, Aunty, but . . .” She could not go on. A great sadness had fallen upon her, a sadness such as she had never felt before.

Downstairs in the parlour they still sat chatting of former times, of the beautiful Lisette and Baron Fritz. Presently the pastor's wife rose, seated herself at the piano, and sang in her touching voice a little song.

“On her grave there stands a linden tree,
Where the birds and the breeze make melody;
'Neath its branches at eve sit a youthful pair,
The miller's lad with his true-love fair.

“Cold blows the wind, how drearily!
The birds' sweet plaint dies wearily,
The babbling lovers grow silent and weep,
They themselves know not wherefore, merely to keep
With sorrowing Nature in sympathy.”

“Where is our Lizzie?” asked Rosina, when she had come to the end; “she must sing us something, too.”

But Lizzie sat upstairs with old Aunty, and when she heard the singing down below, she wept, too, she herself knew not wherefore. A mist had fallen before

her eyes, shutting out all the golden old days of the past, with their merry sports, with the sunshine and the flowers. Two laughing childish faces receded farther and farther into the distance, and the fog grew thicker and thicker, until it built itself into a great high wall. Before this wall stood the handsome haughty chatelaine out of the portrait gallery up yonder, with the wonderful black eyes, and dress of blue velvet. She stretched out her hands, as though warning the girl away. "What do you seek here?" this is enchanted ground, and you are not one of us. You are only little Lizzie of the Mill. Go back, go back, or it will be your death. Think of Lisette, the beautiful Lisette, and . . ."

All at once she sprang up hastily, and fled away out of the sacred little chamber to her own room. There she threw her-

self upon the bed, and wept in bitter trouble and distress about something she as yet hardly realized, hardly understood. A vague, indefinite sense of loss was upon her, making her life appear all empty and desolate.

Old Aunty stood outside at the door, listening to the piteous sobs within.

“God ha’ mercy!” she said to herself. “I saw clear. She is fond of him—she is fond of Army! It was time for me to warn her. Better she should cry now than later on. Poor lamb! Ay, a first love is so sweet, so precious!”

Below, the guests were leaving. Old Aunty could distinctly hear the parting words that were spoken. “Ay, ay, Friedrich, such is life!” said the pastor, winding up some previous conversation. “It hath its joys and its sorrows. Well, when we sit here old people together, let

us hope we shall have nothing so sad to relate as the story told this evening. Then we may say to our grandchildren, 'See, things have gone well with us. The Lord has blessed us over and above our deserts.' Yes, I fancy I can see you a grandfather, Friedrich, and young Lizzie with a good-looking husband, keeping house here at the Mill. Ah, it will all come in due time. Well, God bless you; good-bye until Whitsuntide. We shall be here on the Monday; on the Tuesday you come to us, isn't it so, Rosina?"

"Good night, good night. Say good-bye to Lizzie and Aunty for us."

Then the house grew quite still. Only in Lizzie's little room the stifled sobs went on unhushed, and it was late in the night when the old woman left her post, and crept downstairs to her own room.

"She is asleep, now," she murmured.

“ God grant her a peaceful awakening and new hope in life, and one day may love and every blessing come to her. She is so young still, so young! And life is long and difficult to many, ay, to most of us ! ”

CHAPTER VII.

WHITSUN-EVE had come. The sun shone brightly in the smiling sky, and darted its golden rays down on the earth, kissing the drowsy rosebuds in the Mill garden, till they suddenly woke and opened; peeped through the snow-white curtains of the different rooms, and burned hotly on the granite seats before the house-door. Aunt Marie was in the garden, filling her apron with flowers, and Lizzie was there too, helping her. She had on a great round straw hat, and garden-gloves, and was zealously at work seeking

out and cutting off the loveliest blossoms she could find.

A new expression had come into the girl's face. Her eyes especially had a changed look. They were not so joyous as would have seemed fitting on this fair cloudless May day, and old Aunty was more tender than ever in her manner towards her darling. A couple of swallows shot down past them from the roof, and then soared high into the blue ether. Indoors all was spotless and bright as a mirror; even the windows of the old-fashioned dressing-rooms upstairs were thrown wide open, so as to admit the pure air of Heaven into every corner, and the whole house was pervaded by a smell of cakes baking in preparation for the morrow. The house of business was closed, and the rattle and boom of the machinery at the works had ceased early

that morning. The hands were all absent, gone home to make ready in their turn for the coming festival. Herr Erving always willingly granted an off-day on such occasions. The work went on all the more merrily afterwards.

The cashier and the two other young men from the office had departed that morning singing, and with their knapsacks on their backs, bent on a short pedestrian tour. Herr Selldorf alone had remained behind. He was at this moment pacing up and down between the alders by the side of the river, in a very contented frame of mind. It pleased him to watch the sunbeams glancing on the water and shining through it to its very bed, and the swarms of tiny fishes at each such sunny spot, darting nimbly to and fro with comic twists and turns. Every now and then he would cast a furtive

look towards the garden to see if no glimpse could be had of a great white straw hat, with corn-flower coloured ribbons. Beneath that hat there shone a pair of eyes more lovely, more expressive, than any he had beheld in his whole life.

At the open window of the parlour, which looked out into the garden, sat Frau Erving, sewing sky-blue bows on a white dress for her Lizzie to wear on the morrow. She had beckoned to her husband to come in to her, and now she was pointing out to him the two figures among the flowers in the garden.

“Look, Erving, how Aunty is petting that girl,” said she, with a smile. “She has always done what she could to spoil her, but it has been getting much worse of late. Some little time back Lizzie went about looking very pale for a day or

two ; ever since then it seems as if she could not do enough for the child."

"Never mind, Minnie, my dear. She could not be in better hands than in old Aunty's. But you are right, she has been looking a trifle pale, has Lily ; and do you know, another thing has struck me ? She has not been up at the Castle for a whole week, though Nelly has been over here several times."

"Oh, it is only some childish caprice. Perhaps there has been some little tiff between the two girls, but she will be sure to go up there to-morrow. She was talking of it, I think."

"To-morrow ?" said Erving, "why, there is young Selldorf coming to spend the day here ! What are we to do with him all by ourselves ?"

"Oh, she will not stay long. They have a visitor up at the Castle—the cousin

Nelly was telling us of—and Army is at home; but Lizzie has always been up to wish them a pleasant Whitsuntide. She can hardly omit it this year,” said Frau Erving, pleadingly.

He nodded with rather an absent air. “He is a fine young fellow, is Selldorf,” he said after a pause. His wife looked up at him and smiled; then he laughed back at her.

“Now I know what you have in your head, old man,” cried she, merrily.

He stooped down to her. “Really, Minna? Well, would it be such a bad thing? You see, I must have a son-in-law who will suit for the business, and this young fellow is one in a thousand. I have got to know him well now—just the same honest, upright character as his father.”

“Husband,” said she, and her great

eyes looked up at him almost beseechingly, "make no plans as yet, I entreat of you. She is hardly more than a child as yet."

"Were you older when you became my wife, Minnie?"

"No, Friedrich, but . . ."

"And have not we been happy together up to this time, and are not we going to be happy ever so much longer?"

She nodded, but took up her pocket-handkerchief, and pressed it to her eyes. "I did not mean that, dear," she said, as he took her hand, and passed his other arm round her; "but I would so gladly have her yet a little while all to myself, for who knows how long I may . . ." She broke off, trying to repress the tears that were welling forth. "Have patience with me," she pleaded, noticing that a changed, a distressed expression had come

over his face. "There is such a heaviness at my heart to-day. Don't go away." She smiled up at him again. "Yes, Erving, I shall be glad too for her to find a husband worthy of her, but he must be to the full as good, as honourable a man as yourself."

He looked at her fondly. "He must be the best that is to be found," he agreed, "and you shall be the one to decide it."

"Erving," said she then, reflectively, looking out at the slender figure going along the gravel walk with an apronful of flowers, "Erving, I must be very attentive now, and observe this Selldorf of yours narrowly."

"Do so, Minnie," he replied, releasing her hand. "You will find him a right-minded, honest fellow." With that he kissed her kindly on the brow, and left

her alone to her dreams. The airy muslin at which she was at work slid from her lap, and gradually the lines about her mouth relaxed into a soft happy smile.

So Whit-Sunday arrived. Before the house-door of the Mill stood two perfectly straight, bright green May-poles, from the uppermost branches of which red ribbons floated in the warm spring breeze. The pigeons sat in a row on the roof and cooed and plumed their feathers. Peter, mounted on the carriage-box, proudly reining in the spirited bays, had also tied to his whip a red favour in honour of the day, while at either side of the comfortable open carriage fresh branches of birch were stuck triumphantly. Presently the sound of church bells was heard from the village below, and Mina—Dolly had to stay at home to-day and cook—Mina, dressed in her Sunday best, hymn-book

in hand, went by, nodding furtively to Peter as she passed. Then the master came out of the house and lifted his wife into the carriage. Lizzie and old Aunty followed, the former looking more lovely than ever in her airy white dress and blue sash and breast-knots. Aunty shone resplendent in black silk. Her cap was trimmed with lace and bright purple ribbons, and in her hand she held her prayer-book, together with her handkerchief and a many-coloured posy. Lizzie, too, carried a bunch of rosebuds in her hand.

Dolly, curtseying, closed the carriage-door.

“Be sure and not let the fowls burn,” exhorted Aunty.

“No fear,” replied the girl; and then added, looking at her young mistress, “say a prayer for me, too, Fraulein.”

Lizzie nodded. "Why I, in particular, Dolly?" asked she, smiling.

"Oh, because the Almighty must take pleasure in the looks of you, for sure," remarked Dolly.

Herr Erving laughed. "Now, Peter, my man, set out."

So the carriage rolled away down towards the village, and its occupants had enough to do to respond to the salutations addressed to them on all sides. As they passed the pastor's house, a perfect rain of flowers fell into Lizzie's lap, and the band of small assailants, crouching behind the hedge with many a merry titter, sprang up directly the carriage had passed, and shouted with all the might of their by no means feeble lungs, "Good morning, cousin Lizzie, cou-sin Liz-zie!"

At the church door stood Herr Selldorf.

He blushed to the eyes as he gave his hand to Lizzie to help her alight, and then asked permission of Herr Erving to go with them into their pew. So he sat next the girl during the sermon, for Aunty had taken her place with Lizzie's parents on the front seat. Honour to whom honour is due! Frau Erving and the pastor's wife, who with her two boys occupied the minister's pew, exchanged surreptitious nods; and Herr Otho Selldorf, looking round the little church, where a numerous congregation had devoutly assembled, thought he could perceive that all eyes were directed towards his charming neighbour. She sat very quiet, her head lowered, and almost hidden beneath the fine straw hat, her small hands clasped in her lap, her lips slightly moving. During the whole sermon she maintained this attitude, and once her companion

fancied he saw a great, shining drop fall down on to her white dress. But no, that was impossible. What cause for weeping could so young and captivating a creature have on this marvellous Whitsunday? And, indeed, when the pastor had pronounced the blessing, and the assembled people had raised their voices in the closing hymn, she looked up, and her blue eyes shone clear and serene as before.

As they drove homewards, Lizzie rejoiced in the sunshine, and watched with interest the gay holiday folk crowding the high-road. At the great linden-tree Peter was told to stop and open the door to let his young lady alight. "Give my love to Nelly, Lily," cried Aunty after her, as she went forward with a light quick step along the shady road. Her heart began to beat rather fast, it is true, as she turned into the linden avenue.

She took off her hat, and walked more slowly. Yonder before her appeared the majestic portico, and the two stone bears flanking it looked more grim than ever, and seemed to raise their paws in a threatening manner she had never noticed before. She stood still, and pressed her hand on her throbbing heart. Should she turn round and go back? But then, what would Nelly say if she never went near her—Nelly, who had been accustomed to see her come almost every day? Her friend would begin to think she was afraid of the strange cousin. No; courage! she would go on.

She walked quickly forwards to the end of the avenue and there paused once more, in surprise this time, for not far from her on the lawn, in the shade of the mighty old trees which kept guard, like sentinels, round the open space before the Castle,

stood a breakfast-table, ready served. Before it, in a reclining chair, sat the younger Baroness, her back turned to the approaching visitor. Opposite her sat the dowager, immersed in the study of a newspaper. Numerous cups and saucers showed that the delicious morning had tempted the whole family out to breakfast in the open air. Lizzie hesitated, not daring to go near. Suddenly the old lady raised her eyes, and became aware of the young girl's presence. At sight of her, she started so violently that a delicate china cup was thrown from the table, and falling with a crash on to the stone seat before it, shivered into a thousand pieces. Before Lizzie could reach the table, the old lady cried out to her hastily—

“How very improper to startle us in this way!”

“Good morning, Lizzie,” said the younger Baroness, raising herself in her seat, and holding out her hand to the young girl.

“I beg your pardon,” Lizzie apologized, addressing the elder lady. “I had been here some little time, but I did not like to come forward and disturb you.” She spoke in a quiet self-possessed tone, which contrasted with the old lady’s angry exclamation. “And,” she continued, “I have only come up for a few minutes to wish you a pleasant Whitsuntide, and to see Nelly.”

“Sit down, Lizzie,” said the young Baroness. Nelly will be here directly. She has gone a little way into the park with Blanche and Army. Ah, there she comes already. I can hear them talking.”

The Dowager shrugged her shoulders impatiently as Lizzie sat down, and in-

quired with affectionate sympathy after the health of the pale lady by her side, from whose cheeks the faint flush called up by her mother-in-law's sharp speech had already disappeared.

Meanwhile the voices came nearer, and Lizzie could distinctly hear the deep sonorous tones of her former playmate. A hot suffocating feeling took possession of her, and for a moment seemed to confuse her mind. Then her eyes widened with a look of astonishment, for yonder, to the left, near the empty granite basin of the fountain, she beheld Armand in the company of a young lady on horseback, whose peculiar and somewhat fantastic appearance at once attracted her whole attention.

Could the fairy-like creature, so lightly balancing in the saddle yonder, really be a grown-up person? Presently the

stranger cried in a musical voice, but with the imperious accents of a spoilt child—

“Let go, Army, let go. I want to show my aunt how I can ride by myself.”

Army stepped back; and the horse came on towards them at a slow trot. At every movement of the animal the white lace-trimmed dress flew in a thin cloud round the slight figure which sat so securely on its back. The eyes were lowered, but about the brow and round the pale face was a golden glimmer, showing brightly now in the full sunlight, and down the fairy's back rolled masses of luxuriant, wonderful, red hair.

“Superb, Blanche, superb!” cried Army, whose gaze seemed fascinated by the charming vision. “Fräulein Elise at Renz's circus could not ride better.”

He walked slowly on, keeping at some

distance from her, and stopped close to the table; for just then the fair rider turned her horse's head, and came straight towards the group. The old Baroness's eyes sparkled with pleasure. She herself had been a much-admired horsewoman in her time, and "sport," she felt, was a noble passion, well befitting the great.

"*Bravissima*, my angel," she cried, as the young lady halted, and, with Armand's assistance, slid easily from the saddle. "You have the horse marvellously under control; but, *mia cara*, how can you ride in the fierce heat of the sun without a hat? Be careful, I do beg of you. Your wonderful complexion! In the country one must always . . ."

"Oh, no fear, Aunt; I *never* tan." She dropped negligently into a rocking chair, which Army advanced for her,

without noticing the young girl sitting opposite.

“Fräulein Elizabeth Erving, Nelly’s friend,” said the younger Baroness, with a little introductory wave of the hand. “My niece, Blanche von Derenberg.”

Blanche raised her lashes, and, without any change of her easy attitude, replied to the girl’s graceful salutation by a slight inclination of her head. Her dark eyes rested on the visitor for a moment, however, with an expression of some curiosity. Then she felt for the ivory fan which hung at her side, opened it, and behind this screen, screwed her little mouth into an unmistakable yawn.

Armand bowed politely, and in answer to his mother’s question as to what had become of Nelly, replied that she was probably loitering somewhere in the park. At this moment Henry came, and led

away the horse. The old man looked so majestic in his new maroon livery, that Lizzie hardly recognized him at first, but stared at him in surprise. The young lady in the rocking chair noticed this, no doubt, for a rather derisive smile flitted across her face, twitching her rosy lips. Then she rocked herself more diligently than ever, until suddenly she came to a stand.

“What do you do here all day long?” she asked, raising the fan again to conceal a second yawn.

“We will go for a walk this afternoon,” replied Armand, quickly. “There are charming glades and paths in the forests.”

“For a *walk*?”

“Unfortunately, we have no carriage at our disposal,” observed the younger Baroness, simply.

The old lady laughed ironically.

“The remark was superfluous, Cornelia.”

“Are not you fond of walking, Blanche?” asked Armand, who had seated himself in the chair opposite his mother.

“No,” she declared, without raising her eyes.

The young officer bit his lip.

“Could not we ask Justice Schmidt to lend us his carriage for a couple of hours?” he inquired, after a pause. “What do you say, Granny?”

“I say I think it an amazing idea of yours, Army. You really could not expect any one to get into that Noah’s Ark.”

“But, Granny . . . True, I hardly think the carriage would be at liberty to-day; the family generally go out for a drive on Sunday afternoon.”

“I decline the pleasure once for all,” protested the old lady.

“May I offer our carriage?” inquired Lizzie. “My father would be delighted, I am sure . . .”

“That would be a way out of our difficulty,” cried Army. “If you would like it, Blanche, we will accept, will we not, Granny?”

“Thank you, not for me,” the latter replied; but Blanche said neither yes nor no. She was examining with some curiosity the young girl opposite in her simple white dress. Who could she be?

“Well, make up your mind, cousin,” begged Armand.

“Yes, decide,” added his grandmother, a sarcastic smile playing about the corners of her mouth. “Whitsuntide comes but once a year; and on working days the

fine horses have no time to spare. They have to fetch the rag-carts, you see."

"Father's carriage-horses do not do the work of cart-horses," said Lizzie with trembling lips. "They would not have time. They are kept exclusively for my mother's use, as she, unfortunately, cannot walk far without fatigue."

"I don't care to drive to-day," pronounced Blanche. The word "rags" had sent a shudder through her frame.

"Is there much society about here?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Armand, pleasantly; "but we keep up no intercourse with the people around. Having no carriage, you see . . ."

"And in the immediate neighbourhood there is not a single family with whom we can suitably associate," completed the old Baroness.

“Oh!” said Blanche, leaning back in her chair. Then she shook her long golden-gleaming hair forward, and began to twine stray tresses of it round her fingers.

Armand flushed crimson, and cast a rapid glance over at Lizzie, who had risen suddenly. The sweet face was pale as death, and in the great eyes a tear was glistening.

“I must say good-bye now, without waiting for Nelly.”

“She will be sorry not to have seen you, Lizzie,” said the invalid lady next her, holding out her hand. “Perhaps you will meet her in the park. Remember me to your parents and to Aunty.”

“Thank you, my lady,” replied Lizzie, and, bowing to the rest, she turned and went. The Dowager’s dark eyes followed the slender figure with an almost indescribable expression of scorn.

“Thank God!” she exclaimed, drawing a deep breath of relief. “I don’t know how it is, but the sight of that girl always puts me out of temper, and makes me say spiteful things. She has such a detestable way of rattling her money-bags. What presumption to offer her carriage! And you, Army, were within an ace of accepting it. Fancy exhibiting yourself in the miller’s coach, which every child in the place knows. I call it eccentric of you in the extreme.”

At this moment Nelly came hurriedly towards them from the avenue, her fair locks streaming back from her heated face. The clean, but more than simple, cotton frock she wore hardly reached to her feet, which were encased in small, by no means ornamental, leather boots, and her black silk apron, though evidenc-

ing careful treatment, bore unmistakable marks of age.

“What has happened to Lizzie?” she asked breathlessly, as she came up to the others. “I met her; she was crying.”

“In the first place, Nelly, allow me to ask where you have been all this time, and to remark that it is most unbecoming for a young lady to run in that way. And wearing such clothes, too!”

“Grandmamma, how funny you are!” she cried, with a merry laugh. “As if I had ever possessed any grander toilettes than these print dresses. I can’t possibly put on my black confirmation-frock on such a day as this.”

Blanche turned her head, and coldly surveyed the despised cotton dress. Her maid would have declined such a costume if it had been offered her. But Armand

flushed with shame. He remembered a little slip of paper which had contained a gold piece, his mother's birthday present to his sister. What had become of that paper, he wondered.

“What was Lizzie crying for?” repeated the girl, impatiently. “She would not tell me.”

Nobody answered her. “Army, do say,” she implored, her eyes filling with tears.

“The young person would appear to be very sensitive,” observed his grandmother, speaking for him. “I made some very general remark which wounded her class-prejudices keenly. It is always the way with these people. They place themselves on a level with you, and when the absurdity of such conduct is pointed out to them, they cannot endure it.”

Nelly was silent. The tone in which

her grandmother had spoken of "these people" was enough to make her understand all.

"Well, I find it too warm here for me," went on the old lady; "and I prefer to retire to the shade of my own cool room. Visitors will always be welcome," she added, as she rose, looking over with a friendly smile towards the young lady in the rocking-chair. Those dark eyes of hers could yet beam at times with such a soft, seductive light!

"I will go with you, mamma," said her daughter-in-law, rising in her turn. "Nelly, you will stay here now, dear?"

The young girl took a seat by her cousin's side. She had pictured this same cousin so very different a person, had rejoiced in thought at the girlish talks they would have together, at the

pleasant companionship to come—and yesterday that ardently expected 'post-chaise had brought them an elegant, fragile, fashionable lady whose dark eyes travelled with a cold, investigating scrutiny over the persons and things about her. The two had not as yet exchanged an affectionate word. Blanche was most eloquent with her eyes, and these seemed to say: "How insufferably dull it all is here!"

At first sight both the ladies at the Castle had looked with surprise and admiration on the young stranger with the graceful figure and bright floating hair. The Dowager assured Nelly she never could have believed that small, red-haired, consumptive-looking child Blanche would develop into a beauty of this piquant order. Nelly hardly understood the exact meaning of the

adjective "piquant," but she felt herself that her cousin was beautiful. She felt it more strongly than ever at this moment, when the long lashes were lowered over the cold eyes. That pale oval face, with its dark arched eyebrows, which contrasted so strangely with the gleaming tints of the hair, was indeed lovely to look upon as it lay back encircled by the golden rippling veil. Yes, there was a wonderful likeness to the ancestress upstairs—the same slender neck, the same delicate bust, the same pose of the small head. Some short curls waved on the alabaster forehead, after the fashion of the day, and a pensive smile played about the corners of her mouth. She was still toying with her ivory fan, stroking her cheek caressingly with its smooth surface.

Armand stood opposite her, leaning

against the trunk of the great lime, his eyes meditatively fixed on the fair figure before him. She was here at length, in the home of his fathers. With what a throbbing heart, with what joyful expectation, he had looked forward to her coming, and now it almost seemed to him she was like a caged bird, who would gladly have taken flight, winged its way out of this solitude, back to busier, more cheerful scenes. She was so cool in her manner towards him. Even the rooms, which he had prepared with so much care and thought, failed to please her. She hardly vouchsafed them a glance.

Heavens!—after all, what he had been doing was wonderfully imprudent! The expenses he had incurred would amount to more than two years' pay, together with all the extra subsidies he could hope for. Bah! if once he had a firm grip on

that little hand, the whole business would be a mere bagatelle, not worth mentioning—so Granny had declared to his mother who, poor lady, viewed with apprehensive looks the brand-new upholstery, and sighed over the grand liveries provided for Henry and the groom. This latter had lately arrived with his, Armand's, own sorrel and Blanche's riding horse. There were two mouths now feeding in the marble cribs which had so long stood empty. Still more, a professed cook had been temporarily engaged, and was at the present moment exercising her craft in the great kitchen of the castle—and all this for the little sylph yonder who sat there so unconcerned and indifferent!

Armand sighed, and glanced at the grand old edifice standing yonder in the glare of the noonday heat. The burning

rays scintillated on its pointed, slate-tiled roof, imparting a little trembling motion to the air. Over in Blanche's room a pretty lady's maid leaned out and closed the window.

“How foolish the girl is!” cried Blanche, springing up from her chair.

“She knows I like the warmth, and then think of the horrible damp air of those lofty old rooms! Nelly, tell her she is to leave the window open.”

The little girl ran off towards the Castle, evidently glad to escape from the oppressive silence and ennui.

“Which are my rooms, after all, Army? One gets lost among all that crowd of windows.”

“Over there, cousin,” he explained, coming nearer her. “There on the second floor. Your dressing-room is next the tower.”

“Oh, so that is the door which is so artistically covered with green baize. I could not make out whether it was a wardrobe or a door that was hidden behind those nailed-down folds. But,” she went on, “why did not they give me the room in the tower? It must be delightful with its great bow-window, and I should have had a prospect all over the country.”

“I am very sorry, Blanche,” said Army. “The same idea occurred to me, but Granny appears to have special reasons——”

“Really? Is it haunted, do you think?” she interrupted with some animation.

Army laughed. “No, I am afraid not, cousin—at least, I never heard of it. If there were a ghost about, it must be that of the Baron of Streitwitz who shot

himself for the sake of your charming prototype, so the chroniclers declare.”

She took no notice of his last words.

“Army, I do wish you would manage for me to have the room in the tower.”

Her voice had a sweet supplicating tone, like that of an imploring child.

“I will go and ask Granny again, Blanche.”

“But soon, Army; you must go soon,” cried she, smiling upon him.

He looked at her in delight. “Certainly, I will go directly,” he stammered, in a flutter of joyful surprise, for she had not beamed on him so radiantly since her arrival at the Castle. “Blanche,” he went on, “I am afraid that you are feeling terribly bored here”—and the smile vanished from his face.

“Oh, pray,” she said, raising her hand, “don’t pronounce the word, don’t let us

think of it. Tell me something interesting, to amuse me until it is time to go and dress for dinner. What is there to dress for here?" she added, with a shrug of her delicate shoulders. "Tell me," she cried, leaning back and rocking to and fro in her chair again, "who is that young girl to whom your grandmamma—don't be offended—was so abominably rude just now."

"Fräulein Lizzie Erving."

"I know that, but who and what is her father? She spoke of their carriage . . ."

"Her father is the richest man hereabouts, Blanche; the owner of some paper-works—hence Granny's malicious allusion to the rags—the owner also of extensive forests in which we shall be able to take many a ramble, for they reach to our park gates."

“And why has my great-aunt such a dislike to the girl?”

“Ah, Blanche, Granny does not trouble herself about the why and wherefore. She has always had a most inexplicable aversion to this young Lizzie; besides which, it annoys her that Nelly and she should be so intimate. Granny has a great idea of rank and its obligations, you know. After all, she is not altogether wrong.”

Blanche shook her head. “Do you know, Armand, there is quite an old-world atmosphere about this place. All these prejudices are rapidly dying out in our days. Oh, a letter,” she broke off, hastily taking an elegant square envelope from a tray presented to her by old Henry, who forthwith withdrew noiselessly as he had come.

“From Léonie,” she said to herself,

tearing open the letter, and beginning to read. For one moment a deep flush overspread her face, then it grew white, white as the dress she wore. The paper shook in her trembling hands. Suddenly she laughed out loud, an unmusical, uncanny laugh which startled the young officer opposite. "Well, this is amusing," she cried, crushing up the paper into a ball. "Now, this just furnishes a proof of what I was saying to you, Army. The world is by no means so exclusive in its notions as your grandmamma. Léonie von Hammerstein writes me word that Count Sebach has got engaged to a Fräulein something or other, the daughter of an Inspector of Forests. He is madly enamoured, it appears; is marrying for love, as Léonie expresses it—do you hear, Army, marrying for love!" She laughed, but her black eyes glittered,

and seemed almost to emit fiery sparks, while her little hands were busy, tearing the paper into a thousand fragments.

“What, that Count von Sebach who danced with you so often last winter, who fairly showered bouquets on you?” asked Armand. He spoke eagerly, and his eyes were fixed with a keen scrutinising gaze on his cousin’s agitated face.

“Did he dance with me? Really, I hardly remember,” she replied carelessly, looking away into the verdant leafy labyrinth of the trees and shrubs—but there was a nervous quiver of the delicate nostrils which betrayed some hidden feeling. “Yes, the world is progressing rapidly. To think that a proud man like Sebach, who but a little while ago was boasting of his spotless genealogy, should fall in love—ah, ah, Armand, it is absurd, is it not?—should fall in love with a

plebeian damsel and raise her to the position of his wife!" She shook her head scornfully, and again a short, unnatural laugh escaped her lips. Then she rose so abruptly that the elegant ivory fan suspended by a silver chain from her waist rattled against the massive table. "I am horribly tired," she said, laying her small white hand over her eyes, as though the sunlight dazzled her. "I am not accustomed to remain so long in the open air; it will be better for me to go and rest a little while that I may be fresh again at dinner-time. *Addio*, my cousin."

She nodded to him, declining his company by a significant gesture of the hand, and walked away over the open space before the Castle. It almost seemed as if the light figure were borne along by invisible wings, as if the golden

veil, which depended from her small head, might at any moment spread and carry her aloft, so airy and sylph-like was her whole appearance. At the small door which gave entrance to the tower, she stopped, and turned again; then a clear silver ripple of laughter reached Army's ears. How different in sound from the harsh, spasmodic laugh he had heard just before! What a strange enigmatic creature she was! When would it be his right to solve the enigma?

At dinner the young lady appeared in a brilliant toilette. She wore a costume of pale green silk, which gleamed softly through a white over-dress of some airy, light texture. Her wonderful hair was gathered together, and fastened at the back with an ivory comb, and her delicate wrist was encircled by a broad band

of dead gold on which sparkled a magnificent emerald. The apathetic calm, which had given to her features so cold and listless an expression, had altogether vanished. Blanche had a pleasant smile for every one now, and the old Baroness directed many a gratified, approving glance towards the young pair seated opposite her. It was long since such merry tinkling of glasses had been heard in the cool spacious dining-room, very long since Henry had uncorked one of those carefully-kept, silver-necked bottles, the contents of which were so highly esteemed by the Dowager. To-day, in honour of the occasion, the bubbling wine frothed once again in the tall slender glasses. Henry bore in the various courses with the grand dignified air habitual to him; keeping an observing eye the while on the small party assem-

bled round the dinner-table, and more especially on the beautiful young lady who sat at his master's side. Had not her maid declared that, for a certainty, she would one day be enormously rich, and that she could count as many suitors as she had fingers on her hands? Old Sanna beamed with delight, for her mistress had on several occasions given her hints of how matters stood, and she was rejoicing in anticipation over the prosperous days which were in store for her lady. The bright-haired stranger's merry laugh resounding through the lofty chamber was full of happy augury, and the young officer at her side felt his heart beat violently as he met her radiant eyes, or as her soft breath fanned his cheek.

But Nelly, what ailed little Nelly? She to whom her brother's will was wont

to be as law, who always declared herself on his side, let him say or do what he might, who was ever ready to read in his eyes the slightest expression of his wishes—this docile, pliable Nelly now manifested towards her cousin a cool indifference which almost bordered on rudeness. She seemed to take no notice of what was going on. The rosy mouth, usually so prone to laughter, remained severely set and closed to-day, and she only looked up now and then to cast a shy glance at the happy countenance of her brother opposite, who never wearied in his attentions to his fair neighbour. Again and again a pale face rose before her; she could see great tears standing in the sweet blue eyes. What had they done to Lizzie, to her Lizzie? No, she would not bear it—she would go down to the Mill, and find out who had insulted her friend.

It was quite dark when Nelly came out of the little bedroom where she and Lizzie had been having a long talk in the twilight.

“Nothing of any consequence, Nelly,” Lizzie’s soft voice repeated for the hundredth time. “It was very foolish of me to take offence at a trifle which really is not worth speaking of. Come now, I will go with you part of the way.”

So they walked together over the foot-bridge, and in the deep shade of the trees along the familiar road. It was a warm evening. Not a breath stirred. On the horizon a dark threatening mass of cloud had gathered, and from time to time a blaze of sheet-lightning would come, illumining the country with its pale, weird gleam. The nightingales trilled in every bush, and from afar sounded the chanting voices of young holiday-

makers who were giving vent in song to the exuberant gaiety of their hearts.

“I don't know what it is,” began Lizzie, drawing a deep breath, “but I feel to-night as if I were being stifled. The air is so heavy and sultry. I think Aunty is right, and we shall have a storm.”

Nelly nodded.

“Mother was complaining, too, that she could not breathe,” continued Lizzie. “Do you know, Nelly, Whitsuntide never seemed sad to me before as it does this year, and yet everything is just as it has always been. I hope nothing dreadful will happen, if the storm really does break!”

They had reached the park-gates now. Mechanically they still paced on along the dusky avenue where the scent of the lilacs and flowering alders was so strong

as to be almost stupefying. Lizzie put her little hand to her aching temples. Presently she felt a slight pressure on her arm, and Nelly stopped.

“Lizzie, do listen. Was not that Blanche’s voice?”

For a while all was silent. Then steps were heard approaching, and through the stillness the sweet clear tones of a woman’s voice were borne over to them.

“Army, my dear, dear Army!”

How soft, how alluring, was the sound! The young girl posted so near the speaker felt as though a sharp knife were suddenly plunged into her breast. Instinctively she pressed her hand to her heart. Now there came a whisper; that was his voice. How glad she was she could not hear what he said! Oh, if she had but stayed at home!

The rustle of skirts and the slow foot-

falls came nearer. She dropped her friend's hand, and fled precipitately, taking refuge behind the thick trunk of a venerable lime. Yet, once secure in her hiding-place, she bent forward again and watched. Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning rent the sky, and she distinctly saw two figures—the one, that of a fine, tall man, and clinging to him, ærial and light as a sylph, a graceful form she recognized as that of the beautiful stranger cousin Blanche. Her head was thrown back, and as the swift light fell on her features, he stooped and kissed her. It was but a moment, but that moment revealed all to the blue eyes opposite. The girl laid her head against the trunk of the old tree in an agony of fierce pain—of pain such as she had never known before. But Nelly gave a piercing little shriek, “Army, Army!”

It was a warning, almost an accusatory cry. And he answered her with such a happy, jubilant ring in his voice, "Little sister, where are you? Come and see what I have found. Come. You shall run up first and tell Granny that luck has come back to the old house once more; that Blanche is mine!" Then another vivid flash blazed through the trees, and by its light a slender, girlish figure could be discerned, hurrying at full speed down the avenue homewards.

Little Nelly stood before the engaged couple, and looked up at her brother with wistful, apprehensive eyes. As the light died out again, a great sob escaped her breast, and with drooping head she walked away on towards the Castle, to bear to her mother the news that Blanche and Army—her darling Army—had pledged their faith to each other, and would one day be man and wife.

Old Aunty sat on the stone seat before the door, waiting for her darling. The master and his wife had gone into the garden to seek fresh air, and Herr Sell-dorf was with them, pacing up and down, and talking much of his home, and his brothers and sisters.

The old woman sat musing, and each time a rapid yellow flash flamed through the sultry air, she thought, "Oh, if only Lily were safe at home again!" "Dear, oh, dear!" she whispered to herself: "it will be wet to-morrow, and the picnic for the pastor's children will have to be given up. Ah! well, they must amuse themselves here as best they can, and a fine racket and scrimmage there'll be in the old Mill. Let me see, how many shall I have to dinner? From the parsonage alone there'll be eight, then the Inspector and his wife, and . . .

Good Heavens!" she screamed suddenly. "Lizzie, how you have frightened me!" and she bent over the young girl who had sunk down prone at her feet, and was hiding her head in her lap. "What ails you, my child? Lily, speak. What is it?" she asked, stroking the little head. "Great powers above!" she went on, "are you ill, my precious?"

No answer came, but the young head was raised, two arms wound themselves about her neck, and a pair of hot, quivering lips were pressed on her cheek. Then the girl fled away into the house. The old woman heard her fleet, light step on the stairs, and next minute the door of her bedroom was closed and locked.

"Strange child!" she murmured, with a shake of the head. But old Aunty did not see her darling pacing to and fro in

the little chamber upstairs, restlessly, unceasingly, until far into the night. Then, at length, the weary head was laid on a pillow wet with tears, the small hands were fervently clasped, and a prayer went up to Heaven, a prayer for Army, with whom she had played as a child, and who was nothing to her now. Ah! was it not sad to think of?—nothing in the world to her now.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was late, very late that evening before the family at the Castle sought their accustomed rest. True, the young bride retired to her room early. She felt so bewildered still, she said ; it had all come upon her so suddenly, so unexpectedly ! She patiently accepted the flattering speeches which the Dowager, radiant with joyful surprise, deigned to address to her, lent a dutiful ear to the few agitated words whispered by Armand's mother ; but then weariness overcame her, and she withdrew to her own room, pulling the door hastily to as she entered. The

affable, artificial smile disappeared from her face, and Sophy, the maid, passed a trying hour in her mistress's company. At length she sat at her writing-table, wrapped in a long, flowing peignoir; her pen flew at full speed over the paper, and the corners of her mouth worked angrily, telling of pique and profound mortification.

But downstairs in the parlour, the mother took her boy in her arms, and, looking into his eyes, which beamed with a happy light, could only murmur, "My dear, good son, may you be happy! It has all come about so quickly, Army, and you are still so young. May God bless and keep you, dear!"

The old Baroness paused in her quick, steady walk up and down the room, halting in front of the group, as the young man pressed a grateful kiss on

his mother's cheek. "Army," she began, visibly impatient at the sentimental scene before her, "you know what you have to do now. You must go to your aunt at once, and propose for Blanche in due form; then I hope all the rest may speedily be arranged. You will only write to Blanche's father. I trust we need not be brought into any closer contact with that person; in any case . . ."

"Certainly, Granny, I shall go," he interrupted her, in a softened voice. Then he went up to Nelly, who was sitting huddled up in the great armchair, hiding her face in her hands. "Little one," he said, gently, "have not you a kind word for me?"

"Ah, Army," she sobbed, "I was so startled, so dreadfully startled, when I saw you down there with cousin Blanche; and it grieves me so that . . ."

“But, Nelly, this is a great piece of good fortune for us all—and I love her so dearly!”

“Does she love you?” asked the young girl, eagerly taking his hands in hers. “Are you sure of it?”

“Why, darling, do you think she would marry me else?” he said, laughing. “She who is so beautiful, and who has all the world at her feet?”

Nelly shook her head, and looked away past her brother with tear-bedimmed eyes. “I fancied it would be so different,” she whispered.

“You foolish little thing!” he said, passing his hand tenderly over her curly head. “But it is good, is not it, to know that I am so happy?”

She nodded through her tears, and then quickly got up and left the room.

Just then the first rumble of thunder

was heard outside, announcing the approaching storm.

“I think Nelly must be ill,” said her mother, apprehensively; “her hands are so hot and feverish.”

“Nonsense, she is naughty, that is what she is—sulking because, as she thinks, her Lizzie was ill-treated to-day,” declared the old lady angrily. “I would wager she has been down at the Mill already, and has asked pardon for us of the young simpleton there. It is absurd, really.”

“Oh, yes, she has been there. She was coming back from thence, I think, when we met her so unexpectedly in the avenue. But, Granny, I must say you were too severe on the poor girl. Blanche thinks so too.”

At this moment there came a dazzling flash, followed by a fearful clap of thunder.

“*Misericordia*, what a storm!” cried the old Baroness, trembling, and forgetting for a moment the sharp answer that was on the tip of her tongue. “Is Blanche afraid, I wonder?”

Hardly had she spoken when the door opened, and the young lady, robed in her ample white cashmere dress, stood in their midst. She held both hands to her ears, and cast about her looks of terror. “I am so afraid!” she said shivering, and fled for a refuge to the great arm-chair which Nelly had just vacated. Armand hastened to her, gazed with concern into her white face, and took her cold little hands in his own.

“I would not live here always for anything in the world!” she went on, with a defiant little stamp of her pretty foot.

“Where would you think of living,

then, my dear?" asked the Dowager, startled into attention.

"Where?" repeated the young lady in a tone of astonishment, totally forgetting her fright for a moment. "Why, dear grandmamma, you surely do not imagine that Armand and I are going to bury ourselves here? No, Heaven forbid!" We shall go and travel first, and see a little of the world, shall we not, Army? I have never been to any of the great baths—Ems, Baden-Baden, then Switzerland and Italy. Just fancy! Italy, that you were telling us so much about yesterday! And then, when we have seen everything, we can look about for a place that will suit us." Suddenly she ceased. The fury of the storm broke forth anew, almost making the old Castle rock on its foundations.

Armand still stood beside his affianced

wife, erect and silent, holding her hand in his, and hearkening to the roll of the thunder, as it died away in the distance. But the old lady stepped up to the pair with an expression of amazement, while even her daughter-in-law had raised herself in her chair, and was listening anxiously to the careless, matter-of-fact chatter of that small red mouth.

“We shall have to live where Aunt Stontheim pleases, Blanche,” said the young man at length, quietly.

“Never, never!” she replied with animation. “I will not be buried in this old Castle. I am young still, and I don’t want to be fettered, but to enjoy life a little. Army, you will take my part. Live here? No, that I declare I will not. Aunt is too reasonable; she will not exact that of me, I am sure,” she added, with conviction.

“Of course, Blanche, we shall travel,” he assured her; “but as to our fixed residence, that is a point for aunt to decide.”

“And if she chooses Derenberg, I shan’t come. No, most decidedly, I shall not come. It is so dreary here. I should die in this lonely place.”

“And you would let me stay here all alone?” asked Armand in a low voice, bending down to look into her eyes. He said it jestingly, but there was a certain anxiety in his accent. “Did you not own to me but a little while ago, out yonder under the trees, that you could only be happy where—where——” His voice sank to a whisper.

A violent shake of the little golden head was his answer. “No, no,” she cried presently, “I did not mean that. I can’t give up every bit of my freedom.

It would be the death of me, if I had to wander day after day through these great cold corridors, to look out on that dismal park."

"But if your future husband should desire you to remain here?" asked the old lady with quick-coming breath, her delicate hands clutching convulsively at the folds of her dress.

"He will not desire it," cried Blanche, passionately, springing up from her chair. The lovely face wore an almost menacing expression, and the little foot was firmly planted on the old parqueted floor. There was no trace now in her bearing of that sweet yielding love with which she had clung to her cousin's arm under the dusky trees. Obstinacy in its ugliest form was suddenly brought to view, and the very tone of her voice was sharp and dissonant, as she went on. "It is absurd,

perfectly absurd, to picture a wife as a slave, and to say to her 'wherever your husband may feel at his ease, you must of necessity be comfortable and happy too. If you are not, well, so much the worse for you!' Army cannot think of taking this course with me. I promised I would be his, and now it all depends upon him whether I am to be satisfied and contented with him or not. One thing is certain, here I cannot and will not stay."

"Blanche!" he exclaimed, his fine eyes resting with almost a scared look on the young creature who had so lately pledged herself to him with many endearing words and soft blandishments of love; "Blanche, I do beg of you, say no more. You are excited to-night. You have been alarmed and overwrought." He rang the bell as he spoke, and led

her back to her seat. "A glass of water," he ordered, as Henry came in.

But his grandmother stood staring in petrified astonishment at the youthful bride elect. What! that silly child was to disperse and destroy with a breath all her cherished plans. In the future, as in the past, she was to live on in banishment and solitude. She was not to sun herself in the rays of the coming prosperity, not to see about her the brightness and gaiety born of the opulence for which she had so long yearned! The Dowager sank on to a chair in a sort of stupor, and with knitted brows watched the tall form of the young officer, as he took the glass of water from the servant, and carried it to his promised bride.

Out of doors the rain was now descending in torrents; a faint flash would occasionally zigzag across the windows, but

the roar of the thunder grew duller and less, already passing away in the distance.

Suddenly a low cry was heard from the adjoining room.

“Nelly!” exclaimed the younger Baroness, and hurried through the door of communication. “Child, what ails you?” she cried anxiously, and going up to the sofa where Nelly was lying, she laid her hand on the girl’s burning brow.

“Oh, she is horrible, mamma, horrible!” sobbed the little sister. “My Army, my dear good Army! She does not care for him, mamma. Believe what I say, she does not care a bit for him.”

“Do not distress yourself, my pet,” said her mother, reassuringly. “She is only a little capricious, it will all come right in the end.”

“No, no, mamma. Directly I saw her, I thought of the old chronicle, and the

verse about the red hair. I can't get it out of my mind. Oh, how I wish she would go away this very evening, and never, never come back!"

With countless caresses and loving words the mother strove to soothe and calm the excited girl. Her own heart misgave her so keenly! The pale lady's head drooped, and great tears welled into her eyes.

Nelly, so comforted, fell asleep at last. It was a restless, uneasy sleep, yet the wan, careworn watcher at her side rose and left her little daughter alone. She was thinking of her other child, her Army. Cautiously she put her head out of the door, and looked around. The old lady and the beautiful niece were gone, but yonder in that deep embrasure, he was still standing, he, her darling, gazing out into the dark night. "Army," she

said, in a low voice. He turned and looked at her inquiringly. She said not another word, but her eyes rested with an anxious scrutiny on his proud, handsome face. He took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

“You may be quite easy, mother,” he said hastily, but his voice was not quite as steady as usual. “She is a spoilt child, a sadly spoilt child, but she is fond of me. I know it, I am sure of it, and she will alter. She is sorry already for having spoken with so much heat.”

The mother repressed her rising tears, and passed her hand affectionately over his brow. “Good-night, Army,” she whispered, and turned quickly away.

“Good-night, mother,” he replied, with a loving kiss. “Have no fear for me.”

A fortnight had elapsed since that eventful Whit-Sunday. Rain and tem-

pests had stripped the trees and shrubs of all their wealth of blossom, which now strewed the earth like a layer of fresh snow. To make up for this, however, the roses in the Mill garden had blazed forth in all their splendour, and the limes in the old park avenue were fairly clothed in bloom. Very often in these latter days had Lizzie travelled this road which she had not thought so soon to tread again. Nelly had fallen ill in right earnest, and at her request old Henry was sent to the Mill to summon her friend to her sick bed. So Lizzie had sat for hours in the lofty, dimly-lighted room, holding her feverish hand in her own.

The message which summoned her to the Castle had arrived at the Mill just when the "racket and scrimmage" foretold by old Aunty, was at its height. The pastor's whole family, and the Inspector

of Forests, with his wife, had put in an appearance at the appointed hour, and Lizzie needed to have all her wits about her.

She had to exert herself and play with the children in the old accustomed manner, and on this occasion she was glad to find an ally in young Herr Sell-dorf. Then Henry had arrived with his disquieting news, and Lizzie had only waited a moment to ask for permission to go. This was promptly granted, unwilling as all present were to see her depart from their merry midst. "Cousin Lizzie, come back soon. Good-bye, Cousin Lizzie," called the small banditti after her, flattening their noses against the window panes. But behind the curtain stood a young man with light curly hair and clear honest eyes, watching the slender figure with the umbrella, as it

crossed the foot-bridge and turned into the forest path, and an expression of disappointment and vexation settled on his good-looking face. What had this long-expected, much-desired Whit-Monday brought after all? Instead of the picnic in the woods, wet weather and a forced sojourn indoors. Instead of earnest gazing into sweet blue een, the teasing, tormenting sport of these wild youngsters, who had already adopted Selldorf as one of the family, and bestowed on him the title of "uncle."

Divers events had befallen at the Castle during the course of this fortnight. Armand had paid a flying visit to his Aunt Stontheim, and had brought back with him, not only that lady's consent to the engagement, but a delightful little carriage for the use of his beloved. A friendly letter had been received from

Blanche's father, so that the paternal blessing was not wanting to the affianced pair.

The bride-elect was amiability itself once more. She had voluntarily expressed regret for having spoken with so much heat on the night of her betrothal; the fact was, a storm always upset her, and tried her nerves so terribly! As to Armand—well, he was the happiest lover on the face of the earth, so thought Lizzie at least. He came frequently into the dim sick chamber to say a kind word to his sister, and his face wore such a radiant look of pride and happiness, as he bent over the patient, and gave her a kiss and a message “from Blanche!” That young lady had only shown herself once at her cousin's bedside. The bright apparition with the rustling train and shining hair had seemed out of place

there, and the invalid had been greatly excited by the visit. "How did she feel?" Blanche had asked hastily, "and when would she be able to get up again?" Then she had talked in a lively manner of the excursions she was daily making, and of the preparations for her wedding. No sooner had she rustled out of the room than poor Nelly broke into a flood of tears.

"Oh, I hope she won't come back for ever so long!" she wailed. "The air seems so hot and close when she is by, and the scent she has upon her makes my head ache."

Of Lizzie, Blanche had taken no notice whatever, though she saw her slender figure standing carefully on guard by the bedside. The grandmother never entered the sick room while Lizzie was there, and Sanna grumbled something about

obstinacy, and that she knew how to nurse quite as well as that silly thing from the Mill. "It was just a whim of the young Baroness's, nothing more."

At length the illness wore itself out. A turn for the better came. The curtains of the sick-room were thrown back, the windows opened, and the young girl lay on the sofa, inhaling with satisfaction the pure air from the forests which stole in so softly and refreshingly. Her grateful eyes were fixed on Lizzie, who was sitting by her side, chatting with her. The two girls were quite alone, for a visitor had not long before arrived at the Castle. Blanche's father—so Nelly informed her friend in a whisper—had come on an errand from Aunt Stontheim, to talk matters over with Grandmamma and Army. "I am right-down glad I need not be there," she added, "for

Grandmamma has looked as black as thunder ever since the letter came announcing uncle's visit. But Lizzie dear," she added anxiously, "you are looking so pale, so pale! I am sure you have over-exerted yourself, nursing and taking care of me."

The young girl blushed and evaded her friend's remark. Just then the sound of voices and the tramp of horses' hoofs were heard outside. "Ah, they are returning from their ride," said Nelly; "come here, Lizzie, let us have a look at them." She rose with a little effort, and walked over to the window. Down below, in the open space before the Castle, the whole family appeared assembled. Blanche was still in the saddle. She wore a black habit, and a saucy little hat with a long black feather set jauntily on her small head. Her hair was drawn

back and gathered together in great puffs at the back, instead of floating loosely as usual. Her horse was restless, but she sat in a perfectly assured and easy attitude, and patted the beautiful animal's neck caressingly with her gloved hand. Armand had already sprung from the sorrel's back ; he was standing before his cousin, ready to help her dismount, and was looking over towards his future father-in-law, who came slowly on between the two ladies. This gentleman, a short, corpulent personage, appeared, as Lizzie noted, to be strenuously asserting some combated opinion ; he was gesticulating, and speaking with much animation.

Nelly's mother looked up at the window where the two girls were standing. She nodded to them kindly, and the eyes of her companions turned naturally in the same direction. The elder lady looked

away again indifferently at once ; but the Colonel stopped, lifted his hat, and smiled up to the young people. Then they heard him inquiring about Lizzie, but the answer to his question did not reach them.

Meanwhile Blanche had dismounted, and Lizzie led her friend back to the sofa. Soon afterwards the sounds of voices close at hand told them that the party had come upstairs into the next room. Lizzie took up a book, and was just going to begin reading from the place where she had left off, when the chairs in the adjoining salon were moved rather noisily, and the old gentleman's voice, raised to a louder key, became distinctly audible through the tall folding-doors.

“ I am very sorry that the arrangement appears to be so little to your taste, my lady, nevertheless . . . ”

“It seems, on the other hand, to suit your views admirably, Colonel,” interrupted the old Baroness in her acerb tones.

“Excuse me, I come here as an ambassador from Countess Stontheim, and I have already given you to understand that I shall not mix myself up in the business. I cannot, however, deny that the plan proposed appears to me by far the most sensible one.” His manner betrayed a certain irritation.

“That is a matter of opinion, my dear sir.”

“No doubt. You must, however, confess that Armand is too young and too inexperienced to make a way for himself out of the confusion worse confounded in which the Derenberg affairs appear, unfortunately, to be involved. It will be the work of a very, very able agri-

culturist to raise the deteriorated estates to their former value, supposing, indeed, that there is a possibility of regaining possession of them. The forests, now—Countess Stontheim was talking these matters over with the lawyer Hellwig—the forests are as good as lost. The present owner—what is his name? you must know it—some manufacturer fellow here in the neighbourhood—the present owner will not part with the forests on any terms,—so the forests are gone for ever, and what is a place like this without timber? ”

“Erving will not part with the forests?” cried the old lady; “ah, ah, you little know the man. With such people, all depends upon how much you offer them. For a very moderate profit these tradesfolk would sell their souls. No, no, my dear Colonel, that is an absurd idea, of

which I should not have supposed you capable. I would wager anything—Offer him so much more, and the woods are yours.”

“You would lose the wager, my lady. Hellwig, acting by Madame von Stontheim’s instructions, has privately made overtures on the subject, and has received a most decided answer in the negative. Besides . . .”

A loud laugh from the old lady interrupted him.

“It is possible, after all, that you may be right, Derenberg,” said she; “for this parvenu, after the manner of his kind, hates the nobility in general and us in particular. *Plebaglio!*” she added contemptuously, in her native tongue.

“Besides,” repeated the Colonel, raising his voice considerably—then, restraining himself, he paused, and added politely,

“I beg pardon, Baroness, it matters very little to me what attitude you may have assumed towards this man. That will not alter the business one jot. I was merely going to remark that, as regards the estates themselves and the farms let off, the family affairs have proved to be in a state of chaos—Jews, money-lenders, rights of pre-emption, first, second, third, fourth mortgages, and I don't know what else. In short, Countess Stontheim prefers to have nothing to do with all these intricate matters, a settlement of which could only be obtained at an enormous sacrifice. She wishes, as I have this day had the honour of explaining to you, that Armand should remain in the service after his marriage, which is fixed for the autumn. She undertakes to provide the young couple with ample means. Later on,

should Army feel disposed to settle down as a landowner and country gentleman, she would buy a place for them where they would find all in order on going in, and start fair. Castle Derenberg will always be a delightful summer retreat for the young people, and Armand will at any rate retain possession of the house which bears the family name. What do you say, Army? You are not sorry to wear your epaulets a little longer, are you?"

"Of course, I must submit, uncle," the young man answered; "but I cannot deny that it is hard for me to give up the thought of living at Castle Derenberg. It has always been my most cherished project."

"But not mine," interpolated Blanche, hastily. "I am quite of Aunt Stontheim's opinion. I said so not long ago."

“You do not understand, Blanche,” replied Armand, and there was a quiver in his deep voice as he spoke. “You do not know the magic an old house, such as this, exerts on those who grow up within its walls. You cannot know it, for the proud feeling of setting foot over your own threshold has never yet been yours. No old walls, no deserted rooms, no ancient trees, have spoken to you of the bygone times when our ancestors dwelt and worked out their lives here. It was my dearest dream to settle down in this place where my forefathers, in one unbroken line; have lived and died; and the non-fulfilment of this dream will be very grievous to me, very grievous, dear, believe me.”

“Good gracious,” exclaimed the young lady. “Why, he is positively growing sentimental! The smallest villa on the

cheerful boulevard of our city seems to me a thousand times more attractive than this dreary, deserted . . .”

“Whist, child!” broke in the Colonel, conciliatingly. “Every man to his taste. You, Blanche, are just as dependent on your Aunt Stontheim’s will as Armand is. Whatever she decides, must be done. There is no gainsaying that fact, and I think it would be as well for us now to let the matter drop, and dispute no longer.”

“A very wise remark of yours, Colonel;” here the old lady put in her say. “How hard such dependence is to bear can, however, only be appreciated by those who have once been in a position to command. You do not feel this, never having stood as master on your own land. You were, so to speak, bred to dependence, and in such circumstances it is,

of course, easy to preach peace and calmness to other people. I think it most extraordinary of my lady Stontheim. She has the means, and she will not help. Armand is to be tied to his profession for the absurd and far-fetched reason that he is too young to manage his own affairs—as though older and more experienced persons were not at hand to counsel and help him.”

“You, for instance, my lady?” The officer laughed outright. “Not a bad idea, upon my word. A talent for the manipulation of finances cannot be denied you. You were unlucky in your speculations, it is true; but then who can help that?”

“You are just as incorrigibly satirical as in the old days, Colonel, when I had the pleasure of seeing you here occasionally. In this case, however, your darts

do not strike home, for we were, really and truly, pursued by a vein of ill-luck."

"Unmerited ill-luck, of course," assented the Colonel, with ironical emphasis.

"Uncle, I beg of you, let us desist. This conversation is distressing to my mother," said Armand.

"And, my lad," went on the elder man, quite undisturbed, and speaking impressively, "just to prevent any repetition of this unmerited ill-fortune, precisely for this reason, Countess Stontheim desires that you should not spend the first years of your married life here—not here, of all places, you understand? I ask pardon for having to speak so plainly. I would willingly have avoided it . . ."

"I understand," said the old lady, coldly. "Countess Stontheim is still possessed by the unfortunate idea that

I alone was to blame for the ruin of the whole family. She reproached me with it roundly once, when poverty and trouble first came upon us. Some one must have been to blame," she continued, with a bitter laugh; "and as I, from the beginning, had been looked on as an intruder, as the foreigner—the Italian had always been an object of dislike to them—it was easy to roll the burden on to my shoulders. *Va bene*, you tell me nothing new, my gallant Colonel. I only regret that one so—so" She broke off, suppressing some cutting observation which was evidently on the tip of her tongue.

The Colonel made no reply.

"Uncle," said Armand hastily, "what is the meaning of all this? Aunt cannot possibly maintain that my grandmother"

“Say no more,” cried the old lady; and then the sound of castors was heard, as of a chair pushed hastily back on the uncarpeted floor.

Lizzie and her friend sat in breathless excitement, holding each other's hands. When the former heard her father's name pronounced, she sprang up and looked helplessly about her for a way of escape; but there was no issue, save through the very room where their good name had been so venomously, as it seemed to her, so shamefully, aspersed. The young girl pressed with all the force and weight of her slender body against a tall, locked door which closed a series of empty apartments.

“How shall I get away?” she whispered to her friend, in her distress.

“Stay here, Lizzie,” implored Nelly, drawing her back; “they cannot know

that we hear everything so distinctly. No, do not cry," she supplicated. "Oh, if I were only well, and a man like Army, would not I tell them my mind, if they dared to speak ill of you!" She clenched her little hand fiercely.

They could still hear the old lady pacing up and down in the adjoining room. When her steps approached the door of communication, Lizzie started up again, and looked wildly about for some corner where she could hide from her enemy.

Presently Blanche's voice was heard; coaxing and musically sweet were its soft tones now.

"Dear, darling Grandmamma, I have a favour to ask of you. I had commissioned Army to make the request, but he seems to have forgotten all about it, the good-for-nothing fellow! Ah! yes,

you may well put on that surprised look," she went on archly. "Your lover never behaved so to you, Granny, when you were engaged, did he? He used to read all your wishes in your great beautiful eyes, I am sure."

The concluding words of this exordium were more distinct than the first. Evidently the lovely bride-elect was now standing close to the old lady by the door.

"Now she is putting her arms round Grandmamma's neck, just like a cat," whispered Nelly. "Oh, you would not believe how she can beg and flatter and coax."

"Well?"—this from the old lady's sterner lips.

"I charged Army to beg that I might have the use of the turret-chamber, which is next my room. Oh, do, Grandmamma, do let me have it, *amatissima mia*."

“It was very sensible of Armand not to come to me with any such request. I have refused him this thing once, and I cannot now comply with your wish, my dear.”

“Why not?” demanded Blanche, in an altered tone.

“You must allow me to keep my reasons to myself.”

“Do not tease, Blanche, do you hear?” the Colonel interfered. “Old castles have their secrets, many of which, I dare say, one would not care to see raked up.”

At this moment the door was thrown open, and suddenly the old lady appeared on the threshold, confronting the two girls.

Lizzie sprang from her seat; she no longer sought to fly, however, but stood motionless. The sunset glow suffusing

the sky cast a warm light on the window, weaving round the girl's charming figure an aureole of rosy rays.

The old Baroness started back as though she had seen a ghost, and stretched forth both hands, warding it from her, as it were. "*Dio mio!*" she cried, with a little stamp of her foot. "It is most extraordinary! Do you come here on purpose to frighten me?"

"I am sorry, my lady, that I always have the misfortune . . ."

"It is strange, certainly, how the sight of so fair an apparition can occasion fright," said the Colonel. He had stepped into the doorway, and was looking admiringly at the young girl. "May I beg your ladyship to introduce me?"

The Baroness shrugged her shoulders, cast an almost pitying glance at the

old gentleman, and walked up to the window.

“Well, then, I must introduce myself, Fräulein—Colonel von Derenberg,” he said, affably.

“This is my friend, uncle—Lizzie Erving.” Nelly completed the introduction.

The young girl bowed slightly.

“Erving?” repeated the Colonel, inquiringly.

“The daughter of the present owner of the Derenberg forests, uncle,” declared Nelly, her eyes resting full upon his rather flushed face.

“Ah! indeed,” he replied, “I thought the name was familiar to me. Your father is a sportsman, no doubt, a lover of the noble pastime?”

“Yes, sir; and besides that, he has need of a great deal of wood for his paper-works.”

“ Ah! so your father owns some paper-works? But wood? I thought the best paper was generally made from rags.”

An arch smile stole over Lizzie's face. “ Certainly, Colonel. That is why our house is known in all the country round as ‘ the rag-mill,’ my father as ‘ the rag-miller,’ and I as ‘ the rag-miller's Lizzie!’ ” Her eyes danced with merriment now, and a laugh spread all over her lovely face.

“ The rag-miller's Lizzie! ” repeated the Colonel, smiling in his turn, and looking at her with evident enjoyment of her humour. “ That, I must say, is a name which seems to me but ill suited to you.”

“ I like it,” she said. “ Every child in the village knows me by it. The daughters of our house have always borne that nickname. It has always been the

rag-miller's Gretchen, or Minnie, or Lisette." She stopped in some alarm when she had unintentionally pronounced this name, and looked shyly over at the old lady, who turned quickly from her post at the window, as though an adder had stung her.

"Lisette," she repeated. "You have mentioned a name of which you have no just cause to be proud. Your Lisette was a light-minded damsel, who brought much sorrow on her parents."

"The memory of my great-aunt Lisette is sacred to me," replied the girl, calm still, to all appearance. "She was not light-minded; she was only most unhappy, and that, as I have been told, not through any fault of her own, your ladyship." Her lips quivered with emotion as she spoke these words, and her agitated voice told of the throbbing at her breast.

“Who is this Lisette you are talking about? Who was she?” inquired Blanche, coming into the room. “Who is speaking ill of her, and of what crime was she guilty?” The young lady was standing now between Lizzie and the Dowager, turning her head with lively inquisitiveness from one to the other.

“Keep your curiosity within due bounds, my dear child,” advised the Colonel. “As I told you before, old castles have their secrets.”

“Who told you there was any connection between the Castle and that business, Colonel?” The old lady was pale as death now.

“No one,” he replied, meditatively, with a sharp glance across to her; “but you see, I am great at combinations.”

“It is a great pity you did not turn novel-writer, Colonel. You have missed your vocation.”

“Good-bye, Nelly,” whispered Lizzie, bending down and kissing her friend’s cheek. Then, with a slight inclination of the head to the others, she left the room. Once escaped, she fairly flew along the passage and across the open space before the Castle. In the great avenue who should suddenly stand before her but Armand?

“Fräulein Erving!” She looked up at him. His features wore a very grave expression. “Fräulein Erving,” he repeated, “did you overhear the words that were spoken in our parlour?”

“Yes,” she replied, steadily.

“It is not exactly, exactly—what shall I say?—discreet to listen when family matters are being discussed.”

“I did not listen, Baron von Derenberg,” she exclaimed proudly. “Had there been any way out of the room,

I would gladly, thankfully, have left it."

"You might have gone through the parlour."

"No. Your mother herself asked me to avoid crossing your grandmother's path, for the Dowager Baroness cannot endure me. I belong to people with whom it is impossible to associate, as you know. I was therefore compelled to stay, though what I should have liked best would have been to jump out of the window." The small mouth uttered these words with a bitterness most unfamiliar to it.

"Well, at all events, I must beg of you not to mention to any one that which you have heard. It is a sacrifice I am asking of you, I know. There would be a certain pleasure in recounting all these piquant sayings and doings.

Our family has always furnished ample material for conversation for the whole country-side ; but I think you will make the sacrifice if I remind you that we were once sworn friends, will you not, Lizzie ? ” He held out his hand to her, but the girl stepped back and crossed her arms on her breast.

“ There is no need of a promise,” she replied in a low voice. “ I should have been silent in any case. Especially as some part of your conversation was insulting to my father, to whose house you so gladly came in the days when we were, as you say, ‘ sworn friends.’ ”

He recoiled a little, in surprise and some confusion. “ What ? I said no word against your father.”

“ But you listened and were passive when they called him a *parvenu*, when they said he hated the nobility in general,

and the Derenberg family in particular, that he was bent on revenge; and to listen quietly to a slander, well knowing it to be a slander, to stand by without a word of protest against its untruth, is one way of confirming the statement. Your delicacy of feeling, sir, appears to be at fault at times."

A great bitterness awoke within her, mingling with the poignant pangs of hopeless love. When she had coolly turned her back upon him, and, without once looking back, had walked rapidly away down the avenue, great tears welled to her eyes, and coursed slowly down her cheeks. She did not see how he stood long, looking after her, stood until her slight figure had disappeared from sight. Then, with knitted brow and a sombre face, he turned and slowly retraced his steps towards the Castle.

When Armand re-appeared among the others in the great sitting-room, a calm seemed to have succeeded the storm. Silence reigned. The Colonel had lighted a cigarette, and was comfortably leaning back in one of the deep old-fashioned arm-chairs, whilst the elder Baroness sat bolt upright on the sofa, nervously plaiting her handkerchief between her slender white fingers. Blanche stood in one of the window recesses, looking out into the park, the long skirt of her dark-blue habit lying behind her in heavy folds on the old parqueted floor. She remained quite motionless, taking no notice when her lover went up to her side. He paid no heed to the old lady's impatient question as to where his mother was, and whether she was not coming back soon. His attention was wholly given to the charming figure at his side, which looked more

bewitching, more child-like than ever in the tightly-fitting riding-habit. Gently he raised one of the great golden plaits which had fallen loose over the dark velvet, and carried it to his lips. The young lady gave her head a violent shake without looking round, seized the hair in her little hands, and brought it forward over her shoulder.

“Blanche!” he said, reproachfully, stooping to look into her face. She turned her head away, gazing with apparent interest out into the quiet green garden below.

“Have I offended you, Blanche?” he asked in a low voice. “Are you angry with me?”

She put both hands to her ears with a hasty movement. “No, no; for heaven’s sake let me be,” she cried, facing round on him suddenly. “I do beg of you,

Armand, not to ask me such ridiculous questions. You see I don't want any of your tender whisperings and caressing speeches at this moment. Any one else would have understood it at once, but you must begin to worry me, asking if I am cross, and goodness knows what nonsense!" She tapped the floor petulantly with her little foot.

Armand's face flushed crimson. "I beg pardon," he said, and walked up to the little piano. He opened it, and struck a few chords.

"Oh, please don't play," cried Blanche, putting her hands to her ears again.

He rose. "Well, play something for us yourself, then," he entreated. "I shall be glad to hear a little music. It always seems to soothe and calm me."

"Yes, do play, my angel," cried the Colonel, who had only overheard the last

words of this little scene, and who was glad of any diversion to break the awkwardness existing between him and the old lady.

“On that instrument?” asked the beauty. “No, I cannot play on that; I cannot even bear to hear its jingling tones. Besides, I am too fatigued after my long ride,” she added.

For one moment Armand’s face darkened, and an angry gleam shot from his eyes. Then he went up to the despised instrument, closed it, and came back to his cousin’s side. She had taken up her little riding whip, and was playing with the silver handle. The old lady rose, and left the room.

“I must believe you to be really tired out, otherwise it would be something more than mere caprice for you to refuse me when I ask you to play.”

“Believe it, my lad; accept the excuse,” said the old gentleman, slapping him on the shoulder. “That is the best way to take it. I see you will get on capitally with her.”

Armand bit his lip.

“Shall I take you to your room?” he asked, turning to his affianced bride. “I would advise you to lie down and rest. I may hope for some music after supper, may I not?”

“I think not,” she replied; “for my head aches; and I shall stay in my room.”

The Colonel laughed. “Well, good-night then, and better health and temper to you.” With this and a nod to his nephew, he walked out of the room, still chuckling as he went. Blanche took up her long skirt over her arm, and prepared to follow him. She walked past her lover without uttering a word.

“Blanche,” he said in a low tone, barring the way. “Will you not say good-night to me?”

“You treat me just as if I were a naughty child,” she cried passionately, retreating from him. “I wonder you don’t ask me to beg your pardon. It is just the same to you whether I have the headache or not.”

“You mistake. I neither wish you to apologise, nor do I refuse you my sympathy, now that I know you are ill, but I cannot let you go from me without saying good-night. It is not a very pleasant thing to part thus, you must own it yourself, Blanche. When two people care for each other, as we two care, it is so natural to wish to be on good terms, to have a thorough understanding.”

He had gone up to her, and would have drawn her to him, but she avoided

his touch, swerving impatiently aside, and for a moment her lip curled ironically.

“If you really cared for me, you would not preach to me in that silly way, just when you know I am tired and exhausted,” she answered, brusquely. “You really have the most extraordinary conception of our position the one to the other,” she went on. “This everlasting attention, this mutual dependence, neither being able to express a wish of one’s own, this merging, as it were, of one’s identity—I tell you it is a horrible, dragging chain, and no happiness. I will be free, do you hear? free!” she repeated, and next instant the heavy door crashed to on its hinges behind the light and graceful figure.

He stood as one stupified, staring at the door through which she had passed. A great stillness had fallen on the

room. The glowing sunset sent its last shimmering rays through the window, filling the whole space with a soft rosy light. Gradually, little by little, the brightness faded, and the grey shades of evening fell, veiling the scene with their thin shroud. The young man walked up to the window, and gazed steadily out on the evening landscape. His lips were tightly set, with an expression of profound annoyance and chagrin. Suddenly he started. The sounds of music struck on his ear from above. Hastily he threw open the window, and now the ringing notes were borne down to him more distinctly. Those were the Faust waltzes, played rhythmically, with taste and spirit, as only she could play them. Smooth as pearls rolled the sparkling cadences, while ever through them, brought into masterly relief, ran

the continuous thread of the leading melody.

“She is playing,” he murmured, striking the hard window-sill with his clenched fist.

“Canst find such free from trick and vice,
Hast a treasure of great price,”

he quoted with a bitter laugh—then he went quickly from the room.

Out of doors the mild evening air met him refreshingly. Involuntarily he turned his steps in the direction of the Castle moat where the great alder stood, stretching forth its now forlorn branches, and stopped beneath her window. Close before him rose the massive block of the old tower. The climbing white roses clustering up its walls gleamed faintly over to him through the growing darkness. Overhead the music had ceased. It was finished—no, there it began afresh

—a melancholy air this time. He remembered the words of it—

“Here too a suffering mortal stands :
He looks on high and wrings his hands
In his bitter agony.”

How admirably the piece was executed ! Suddenly it was brought to an end with a shrill discord.

Armand drew a deep breath, as though relieved. In vain he sought to unriddle this fair problem. His heart, which loved so honestly and well, could furnish him with no explanation of her conduct. Again and again that evening the terrible question had forced itself upon him—“Did she love him, after all ?” “I will die rather than give her up,” he murmured, as he walked on. Instinctively his mind reverted to the Lady Agneta Maud and to the Lord of Streitwitz who, it was said, lay buried somewhere in

this garden. He turned into the first covered walk he came to, and paced on and on under the over-hanging trees. He was dispirited and out of tune. All the disagreeable occurrences of the afternoon came back to him with their many painful impressions. He thought of the conversation between his grandmother and the Colonel, and all the hints and innuendoes which, like exploding fire-balls, threw an ugly glare here and there upon the past. He thought of Blanche, of her obstinate declaration that nothing should induce her to make that place her home—then of the stern reproving words Lizzie had spoken to him in the linden-avenue, when he had begged her to betray nothing of that which she had heard. Those simple words and that reproachful look had shamed him. It was true; he had allowed them to

slander that fine, honest-hearted man down at the Mill, saying no syllable in his defence—from heedlessness, principally, so he told himself. His attention had been engrossed by the altercation which had so roughly dispelled his dearest hopes, had thwarted his darling scheme of living here with Blanche in his own ancestral Castle. But Lizzie must naturally suppose he thought as did the others. “No, no, her father is as honourable a man as ever trod. I know that full well.” After all, it mattered deuced little to him what she fancied, or supposed. It was the latest incident of the evening that had left the deepest sting. Those angry impetuous words of Blanche’s still rang in his ears: “You have a most extraordinary conception of our relative position;” and again, “it is a chain, a galling chain, and no happiness.”

“A chain!” he repeated to himself, pausing in his walk. Then he added quickly. “Bah, just a girl’s caprice, nothing more. She is too proud and handsome, of too independent a character, to fit quietly and at once into the narrow grooves traced for all women.” He ought to have thought of this; he must not always try to win her over to his views; that was, no doubt, humiliating to her. She had a right to feel injured, this beautiful, haughty woman, who had given herself to him. And she did love him, he knew it. She had so often assured him of her affection in reply to his pressing, reiterated questions. In the autumn, his uncle Derenberg had said—in the autumn she would be his own, irrevocably his own! Must not all present care take to itself wings and flee away before this blissful certitude of the future?

A soft wind had arisen. It bowed the branches over the young man's head till they met together with a gentle rustle, and rippled the surface of the dark pond at Armand's feet. It scared away into the far, far distance the dismal thoughts which had been oppressing him, and wafted through the still summer night all the soft influences, awoke within him the tender delicious yearnings, of love.

“In the autumn,” said Armand to himself again. “In the autumn all will be well.”

CHAPTER IX.

SUMMER was over, and autumn reigned in her stead, tinting the forest foliage with bright and variegated hues. Overhead arched a vault of crystal-clear blue sky; the first faded leaves strewed the ground, and fluttered down the linden avenue of the park, and the Mill garden was ablaze with dahlias and asters, now in their full glory. Nets were drawn over the vine espaliers, to deprive the dainty sparrows of their longed-for feast, and from the branches of the fruit-trees ripe golden pears and red-cheeked apples peeped forth, waiting to be plucked.

At the Mill all had gone on in the accustomed groove. How quickly the summer had sped by! Now they were looking forward with satisfaction to the long winter evenings, spent comfortably round the warm stove. They were looking forward to something else, too, the good people at the Mill. Every one—to the hands employed at the works, to Mina and Dolly in the kitchen, to Peter in the stable—every one knew that there would probably soon be a wedding in the house. It was clear as day to all who had eyes to see, that Herr Selldorf and “our Lizzie” were soon to be a pair. Every line and feature of the honest young fellow’s handsome face told the story of his love, and no one had the master admitted to such intimate terms, to none of his colleagues had Lizzie’s mother accorded so cordial a welcome. Even old Aunty had always

a friendly nod for him when he came, and when his name was mentioned in the kitchen, she would say, "Ah, he is a fine lad, a real fine lad, is Selldorf!" Lizzie alone seemed to remark nothing of all this. She was at all times friendly and courteous to her father's volunteer, and she never failed to put the huge bunches of forget-me-nots, which he would now and then bring her, into fresh water with alacrity; but no visible sign was there of the tender passion which, as a matter of course, must have sprung up in her heart for him, watch and spy as Mina and Dolly might and did.

"Ah, she just makes believe," said the latter, knowingly; "that is the fashion with the great folk, but inwardly it is very different, is not it, Aunty?"

"Many words make many lies," replied old Aunty, severely. "Don't trouble your

head about Lily, but just mind your pots and kettles. There will be a wedding in the house some day, no doubt, but who the bridegroom will be, the Lord only knows. We can't look into the future, so hold your tongue about things which don't concern you. But there, you girls think of nothing but of men and marrying! Lily knows right well that to choose a husband is like choosing a horse, one needs to have one's wits about one." So saying, she shook her head gravely, with an air of superior wisdom. But great as was the weight her words generally carried, on this occasion they went in at one ear and out at the other. The maids did not need to be told. They could see plainly enough that Herr Selldorf was sweet on their young lady, and time would show who was right.

Meanwhile old Aunty went on, stor-

ing her winter provisions in pantry and cellar, with all her wonted alertness, and Lizzie had to be present everywhere, and lend a helping hand. "For you see, my bairnie, it is all for the household that is to come," said the old woman.

Half that afternoon a great shaking and rustling of the old nut-trees behind the house had been going on, and the ground below, on which a great linen sheet had been spread, was strewn with leaves and fruit. Peter and Christy beat the branches unmercifully with their long poles, while half-a-dozen children scrambled about in delight, fairly rolling over each other in the eagerness of the chase.

Tired at length of watching the sport, Lizzie and her friend Nelly, who had come down to see her that afternoon, left the garden, and went out before the

house. There on a stone table, a white cloth was laid, and old Aunty was busy arranging cups and saucers. The two girls waited in silence, looking on.

“Aunty, you will have your coffee out here with us to-day, will you not?” asked Lizzie, when all was ready.

“Perhaps I may as well,” said Aunty; “especially as there is somebody in with your father just now.” She sat down on the seat by Nelly, and asked Lizzie to fetch her a cup. “How industrious we are!” she went on, as the young girl took a piece of embroidery from a little basket, and began to stitch diligently.

“A wedding-present for Army,” said Nelly, confidentially.

“Bless me!” said the old woman, taking the cup of coffee from Lizzie’s hand. “Why, he is very young yet. It seems to me but yesterday that I saw

him come bounding over that bridge yonder in his little velvet frock.”

Nelly just nodded, but Lizzie turned involuntarily, and looked across at the little bridge, beneath which the limpid water coursed with so swift and straight a current.

“Who is in with father?” she asked abruptly, as though to turn the conversation into another channel; and, as she spoke, she smiled to her mother whose face appeared at the window for a moment.

“A strange gentleman; I don’t know him,” answered Aunt Marie. Then she suddenly set her cup on the table, pushed her spectacles down on her nose, and looked sharply over them towards the road on the other side of the water. “Mercy on us, Nelly, dear, is not that Sanna coming along there between the

trees? She is just behind that group of alders and willows now. It is a long time since I have seen her, but I think it was her gait. Look, there she is!" she cried, pointing to a tall figure, attired in a dark dress and white apron, which had just reached the bridge.

"Sanna here!" exclaimed Nelly. "Oh, what can have happened at home?"

"My lady begs that you will come to her at once;" they could now hear the foreign accents of the old serving-woman, whose face was flushed from her hurried walk.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Sanna, tell me what has happened!" cried the young girl, hastily gathering together her embroidery. "Is it mamma or grandmamma who wants me?"

"Your grandmamma, of course," replied the messenger, not deigning to

bestow a look on old Aunty, or on Lizzie, who was helping her friend to put the coloured wools in her basket. "Your grandmamma is angry that you were not at home, so angry that I came over here at once to fetch you. Your mamma said you were sure to be down at the Mill as usual, and Henry had not time to come; he had to go to the post."

"But speak, Sanna, do speak!" implored Nelly, looking up anxiously at the tall meagre woman before her. "Is anybody ill, or have they had any bad news?"

"My lady has received a letter with a black border," replied the old woman, with a glance and a scowl at Aunt Marie, who had risen from her seat.

"Oh, for God's sake, say it is not Army!" shrieked the girl in horror, looking wildly up into the stern face

before her. "Sanna dear, dearest Sanna, you know, I am sure of it. Tell me, I implore you!" She ran up to her, and caught her hands with a beseeching gesture. Lizzie had dropped on to the stone seat, feeling as if her limbs could no longer support her: her great dilated eyes were fixed almost vacantly on the group.

"I don't know," replied the old servant, shrugging her shoulders, while Nelly covered her face with her hands, and cried again, in a voice broken by sobs—

"Oh, Army! if it should be Army!"

"Don't fret, little Nelly," said old Aunty, taking the weeping girl in her arms, and speaking with comforting assurance. "It is not your brother, or she would not stand there so quietly. Go home quickly, and be of good courage; it is not he."

“Oh, Aunty,” she sobbed, “I can hardly stand for fear.”

“You need not cry, gracious Fräulein,” said old Sanna, with much stress on the “gracious Fräulein.” “Countess Stontheim is dead. Your grandmamma forbade me to mention it at the Mill, for she wishes to avoid all gossip and chattering, and here . . .” She gulped down the rest, casting a hostile and withering glance at old Aunty, who was still standing beside the frightened girl.

“Well, well,” remarked the latter; “you might keep it to yourself, so far as I am concerned. What does it matter to me whether the aunt is alive or dead? But you need not set this poor child all of a tremble with your bad news. It was time enough for her to hear of it when she got home.”

“I have nothing to do with you; I

just follow out my mistress's orders," returned the waiting-woman, contemptuously.

"Oh yes; you follow out your mistress's orders! I have known that of you this long time," said old Aunty, the blood suddenly rushing to her cheeks; and she fixed a penetrating gaze on her adversary.

"I will come with you a bit of the way," cried Lizzie, waking, as it were, from her torpor, and running after her friend, who had already started homewards.

Sanna did not attempt to follow them. She stood rooted, as it were, to the ground.

"What do you mean?" she asked, glaring with an expression of implacable enmity at Aunt Marie, who was busy putting the cups and saucers together.

As the two women stood thus confronting each other, it was evident that some smouldering, long-pent-up animosity had suddenly blazed forth into a fierce flame.

“What do I mean?” returned old Aunty, fearlessly advancing a step nearer, while she kept her honest eyes fixed on the tall dark figure before her. “What do I mean? Ah, Mam’sell Sanna, you have no need to ask me that. I can see by your face that you know right well. Often enough must it have plucked at your pillow, and driven sleep from your eyelids, in the dreary long nights. Often, I know, has it weighed on your breast like a nightmare, not budging an inch, though you counted your beads a hundred times, and prayed to all manner of saints. That was conscience, Mam’sell Sanna, and an evil conscience tears like the

teeth of a wolf. It grips deep and strong, and . . .”

“*Misericordia!*” cried Sanna, striking her palms together, with a passionate gesture of anger. “This is what I get by coming down here myself all in a hurry. My lady is right in forbidding us always to have anything to do with the *plebaglio*, the *miserabile!*”

“What your mistress may say is of no sort of consequence to me,” declared old Aunty; “and you may spare your Italian abuse, for I don’t understand a word of it. But there is one thing I must tell you, Mam’sell Sanna, since chance will have it that we are brought together—this many a year have I longed to speak it. You and your Baroness have a sin on your conscience, which cries aloud to Heaven for vengeance, and which one day will find you out. Perhaps you

fancied no one knew of it, or perhaps you may have guessed rightly that one person still lives who knows the ins and the outs of that business, who knows by what means a sweet blooming young creature was sent to an untimely grave. But I tell you this, and you may take it to her ladyship up yonder from me—God may shut His eyes for a while, but not for ever. He will not always suffer Himself to be mocked at, and I, I, old Aunty of the paper-mill, pray to the good God every night of my life that He will let me see the day when I can go to your proud mistress, and tell her to her face that she is a . . .”

“*Cielo!*” screeched the Italian, fencing with her hands in the air. “What a crazy old creature! I wonder you don’t say we murdered the proud, presumptuous young chit.”

“That I might say with Gospel truth,” asserted old Marie; “and if there were none more proud and presumptuous than she, it would be well for all of us.”

“Am I to put up with such language as this?” exclaimed old Sanna, in a fury. “Perhaps you want to pretend that we gave her poison, or strangled her. If Mam’sell Lisette fell ill and died, she had only herself to blame for it, and she got no more than she deserved. What right had she to fancy our Baron was going to marry her? Why did she make love to people above her own condition in life? A gentleman like that has eyes for a hundred lasses. He does not marry the first pretty girl he sees.”

“Oh!” said the old woman, hastily setting down on the table the tray she had just taken up; “so you want to slander Baron Fritz as well, do you?”

He was worth more than the whole kit up there,"—pointing to the Castle—"and if in later years he grew to be a fast liver and a wild reckless man, I tell you again, it was all your doing. As to the fancying, our poor Lisette had no call to fancy anything. She was Baron Fritz's betrothed, affianced to him in all honour, and, so sure as I stand here, she would have become his wife, if false, wicked traitors had not come between to part them."

Sanna gave a loud scornful laugh.

"You think so really? And I tell you no, so sure as she was Lisette of the rag-mill. There is no place up yonder for people of her sort."

"Pride always sticks its tail out of the nest," said old Aunty, disdainfully. "Our sort, thank God, is too honest and good a sort to suit such evil company

and evil ways as were favoured up there in those days. The Derenbergs had always been loyal, God-fearing people of the true old kidney. They would have turned in their graves, one and all of them, down in the old vaults yonder, if they had known all the goings-on of that proud set."

"Aunty, Aunty," cried the anxious voice of the mistress from the window.

"Directly, Minnachen," she replied, taking up the tray again. "I am coming. You know we old folks like to get talking of bygones, especially when one has not seen one another for a long time, like Mam'sell Sanna and me." Then she marched into the house without once looking round.

"Goodness me, Aunty, what a piece of work you were making out there!" said Frau Erving, reproachfully, as the

old woman entered the room, with a brilliant colour in her face. "I was quite frightened, that great dark creature looked so wicked."

"I wasn't frightened, Minnachen; not I!" answered old Marie. "It was a mercy for me to be able to speak out my mind for once. Years have I waited for the chance. Sometimes I have thought I should have to die without telling them to their face what a great sin is laid to their account; and now to-day—— Ah, I was too gentle, a deal too gentle. If I had had the false baggage in my room, instead of out there under God's heaven, then you would have heard, Minna . . ."

"Aunty, Aunty! 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' What would the pastor say, if he were to see you now?"

"I don't want vengeance," said the old woman in a low voice; "for 'revenge

when by, breeds many a sigh;’ but, believe me, when I saw her standing there, that creature who helped to bring all the trouble about, it was just as if boiling oil were being poured into my heart.” She broke off, for at that moment Lizzie entered the room.

“It is quite true,” reported the girl. “Countess Stontheim is dead. Nelly’s mother met us in the park, and told us so. Army has written that the funeral is to be to-morrow, and after that, he will bring his cousin back here again. The wedding is not to be put off. Everything is to remain just the same. I met Sanna as I came through the wood, Aunty. Has she been staying with you all this time?”

“All the time, my deary. We have been having a very pleasant, nice little chat together.”

Lizzie looked at her rather curiously, and then sat down at the window. Aunt Marie and her mother left the room together, and all grew very still about the young girl whose heart was heavy with the sorrow of a secret, hopeless love. The yellow leaves floated slowly down from the tall limes before the house—dead, faded tokens of the brightness that was past. A couple of small birds chirped and fluttered from branch to branch.

“Suppose *he* had died?” the girl whispered to herself, “But no, no; better far that it should be as it is. Oh, Father, grant that he may be happy . . . for his mother’s sake and Nelly’s,” she added, lingeringly.

Some days passed, during which Lizzie helped assiduously with the housekeeping, and the old ringing laugh pealed

forth more frequently than it had been wont to do of late. "Yes, laugh, my deary," said the old woman once, in delight at the sound. "God loves a hearty laugh." She is in better spirits, she is getting over it, thought old Aunty. The child was so young; she had all her life before her, and that life was so full of promise. Involuntarily Aunty's thoughts reverted to the good-looking, fair-haired young fellow, who was so quiet, and made so little fuss, and yet who was winning such favour at the Mill with his sensible, kindly ways. "Ah, they would make a grand pair," she whispered, half audibly.

Early that morning she had stood watching the young man as, with a gun slung over his shoulder, he set out betimes in company with the master, bent on a few hours' shooting. She had

noticed the quick look he darted back at the window behind which Lizzie was still slumbering, and thought, "If she could only see him now! No one could look sprucer." But Lizzie had not lent an ear when she praised him to her later on; she had only laughed, and turned the conversation to some other topic.

Now it was noon. The soup was steaming on the table in the dining-room, and Lizzie sprang out to meet her father on his return, never even thinking who was with him.

"Good morning, father," she cried. "Well, what have you brought us?" Then she became aware that Herr Sell-dorf was standing behind him. That young gentleman, taking his green felt hat from his curly head, grasped her father's hand fervently, and looked at him with a beseeching look.

“Well, good-bye, then, until this evening, Selldorf,” she heard her father say. Then came a shake of the hands, and the young man disappeared without so much as a glance in her direction. Handsome Herr Erving greeted his daughter rather absently, and threw his pouch into a corner. “Where is your mother? I must speak to your mother,” he said quickly.

“But, Friedrich, the soup!” cried old Aunty from the kitchen.

“Ah, yes. Well, it will do afterwards,” said he. During dinner-time he frequently passed his hand across his face, then smiled, then suddenly grew grave again. Once he looked at his Lizzie so keenly, and yet with such sadness in his eyes, that she laid aside her fork, and asked—

“Father, what has happened to you?”

and "Erving, have you had any bad news?" inquired the mistress, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it," he replied cheerfully, and did his best to appear unconcerned and at ease. The meal was soon over, and directly it was finished he followed his wife into the parlour.

Lizzie went out into the garden and walked up and down, casting occasional timid glances at the parlour windows. After a time she thought she would go back into the house, but old Aunty met her in the little room, and signed to her to keep outside. Full of vague apprehension, she sat down on the stone seat underneath the window, and waited. Much eager talking was going on inside. At last she heard old Aunty's voice say, "No, Friedrich, you must promise me one thing. If she is not willing, you must not try to over-persuade her, for

‘ a marriage due to force, is of endless woe the source.’ ”

“ Of course not, of course not,” answered the father; “ but one may set before her all the advantages and disadvantages.”

The young girl sitting outside had suddenly turned pale as death. In an instant the truth flashed upon her, a full certain knowledge of the subject under discussion within doors. Had she lived in a dream up to this time? Could her parents, could her dear good father and mother, bring themselves to give her from them? Would she have to leave the old Mill, to go away with a strange man, away from her mother and Aunty, from all that was dear and familiar to her? Was she no longer to inhabit that little room upstairs, her very own little room, whence she could gaze over at the towers

of the old Castle? She pressed her hands against her breast; it seemed to her that her heart stopped beating at the mere notion.

“Lizzie, come in here,” called her father.

Mechanically she rose and obeyed the summons. Now she was in the parlour. Her mother sat on the sofa, and Aunt Marie by the window. They both looked at her so strangely, so tenderly; it seemed to her that her mother had been crying.

The old woman rose from her chair, and walked out of the room. She would not intrude between the parents and their child. She went quietly up to her own room, and took the Bible from the chest of drawers. Then she sat down in the old armchair, and folded her hands over the book. “God alone knows what is best,” she whispered; “He will guide

her, and all will be well." Without, the rays of the autumn sun glinted on the many-coloured aster-beds, and long white gossamer threads hung like a silvery veil over the half-stripped gooseberry-bushes. "When spring comes round again, how will it be with us here?" She thought of her darling, before whom the most momentous decision in life was thus suddenly to be placed. How would Lizzie take the disclosure? Had she really never remarked how dear she had grown to the young man? Did she not, in return, care for him just the least little bit? Ah, no. The old woman shook her head. She knew every turn of that young heart. "No, she does not love him, and if she gives him her promise, putting a constraint on herself because her parents wish it, will she be happy? Ah, the love that comes to order is like

a painted face, not made to last! Poor lamb!" she murmured, "they will not go on, and go on, until they talk her over, I hope. Minna will not, but Friedrich—Friedrich is wrapped up, so to speak, in that young man."

She opened the book, and looked down at its yellow pages, but she could not read. The letters danced before her eyes, and her hands trembled. Presently there came a clink of the door-latch. Would it be the glowing, bashful face of a newly-affianced bride that would look in upon her? Old Aunty held her breath. The door was pushed slowly open, and the young girl stood on the threshold. Had she grown taller during the last half-hour? She came in quietly. A great gravity had settled on her pale features.

"Aunty," she said in a low voice, "I have said *no*."

Old Marie made no reply. She nodded her head, as though agreeing with the verdict. "So you don't care for him, child?" she asked after a pause. "Well, they are strange things, these love-affairs, and generally go cross."

"I can't care for any one, Aunty," came a whisper close to the old woman's ear. Two soft arms were wound about her neck, and a pale face nestled on her breast. So the girl remained kneeling by her old friend's side.

"God bless you, my Lily!" murmured Aunty, passing her hand caressingly over the brown tresses. "You have done right."

Across the hall in the parlour the master was excitedly pacing up and down. Frau Erving's eyes were red with weeping; she spoke imploringly—

“But if she does not care for him, Erving?”

“Minna, there is no talking reasonably with a woman on these subjects,” he said, halting before her. “Just consider this lad, will you? He is good-looking and honourable, he comes of a respectable family, and he loves her dearly. His father writes me that they are all ready to worship the lass. Is not that enough? What more does she want? But there is something in the background. That is my belief, and you will not talk me out of it.”

“But, Erving, what can there possibly be?”

“I declare I hardly knew the girl! She, who is generally so docile and tractable, to stand there with her pale face, and say me ‘no,’ nothing but no! God bless my soul, who would have thought it?”

“She is your own daughter, old man,” said Frau Erving. “You know,” she went on with an attempt at a smile, “when your father wanted you to marry Agnes, you said ‘no,’ too, and stuck to it.”

“Ah, that was quite another matter. I had seen you then, and grown fond of you. But this unfledged chit, who has hardly put her nose out of the nest yet! I vow I have not had such a disagreeable job for years as to give that poor lad his answer this evening.”

He stopped at the window, and looked through the panes with an absent air and a heavy cloud on his brow. He did not turn round when presently the door was softly opened, and old Auntie came in.

She paused a moment. “Why, Minnie, what are you crying about? Nobody is

dead, and there is no such hurry with the courting. You've more than a handful, you've a whole land full of men to choose from, and the right one will come at last."

The master, standing by the window, moved impatiently, as though he had a sharp answer ready; but he repressed it, and said quietly—"You speak to the best of your judgment, Aunty."

"Well, I think I ought to know something about such matters. I have lived a good bit longer than you. Our Lily is only just seventeen, hardly out of her baby-clothes, you may say. There will be a hundred suitors at the Mill for her yet, why should she take the first that comes? He is a brave lad, and a fine lad, is Selldorf, but there! we don't all see with the same eyes. One-sided love

is like a question without an answer, and is safe to bring trouble. So just you make the best of it, Friedrich, and don't frown and look black at her. She is your only chick, and why should you force her to marry the man, if she does not want him? It won't help you a bit to fret and fume, and you can't say 'must' in a business of this sort, so just give it up, and thank the Lord the child is spared to you yet awhile. When she gets a husband, she'll be yours no longer."

"That's enough; that's enough," he replied impatiently, and began pacing up and down the room again. The old woman said not another word. She knew she had gained her object, so she took out the stocking she was knitting, and sat down in her accustomed place.

"Has she said anything to you?" asked the mother after a long pause.

“Yes, she came to me, and told me how matters stood, and then she cried and begged me to go and try to bring her father round.”

“Where is she?” he asked.

“She has gone up to her own room.”

“Oh,” he replied, and began walking up and down again; then he turned to the door, and went out.

“I know well enough where he is going,” said the old woman, with a nod and a smile. “He was sadly put out, eh?”

“Oh, it wasn’t so bad, Aunty, but I am not used to see him angry; it frightened me.”

“Now, just look out there, Minnie,” said she, pointing to the garden, and, sure enough, there was the master going slowly along the gravel-walk with his

arm round his daughter's waist. Her head was leaning on his shoulder, and as he spoke to her, she looked up at him and smiled.

“My good husband, my darling child!” murmured the watcher at the window, and her heart leapt for joy.

END OF VOL. I.



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